

Gary Burton: The Art of Comping

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THE CONTEMPORARY MUSIC MAGAZINE

WOODY SHAW

*"A Great Trumpet
Player" —Miles Davis*

FRED FRITH

Sound Exploration

WARNE MARSH

In The Tristano Mold?

**HOWARD
JOHNSON**

Respect the Tuba!



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WOODY SHAW

LINKED TO

A LEGACY

BY LINDA R. REITMAN

IN A RECENT INTERVIEW WITH LEONARD Feather, Miles Davis laid to rest all myths about who's really playing the trumpet these days. Asked about Freddie Hubbard, Miles responded, "all technique, but no feeling." On Wynton Marsalis: "All the [young] trumpeters copy off of Clifford Brown, Fats Navarro, Dizzy . . ." How about Woody Shaw? "Now there's a great trumpet player. He can play different from all of them."

Dexter Gordon summed up Woody Shaw's trumpet prowess succinctly: "The thing

about Woods is he's done his homework. He's hip to Louis Armstrong, plays intervals, and runs backwards so to speak. He breaks it down, plays atonal, and then comes back and plays real trumpet. Woods covers the whole spectrum."

Shaw's conception of music, however, does not stop with the trumpet, and Shaw is quick to emphasize that he has listened to and learned from many saxophonists and pianists. He credits John Coltrane with leading him into the pentatonic scale and to the

use of wider intervals. And with McCoy Tyner, Shaw gained experience and found the music to be "wide open, leaving room for you to express yourself."

A look at Shaw's musical associations serves to illustrate a background which is both varied and colorful. His father was a member of the Diamond Jubilee Singers, a gospel group which toured extensively across the South and through parts of the East. Woody first picked up the trumpet in the sixth grade in Newark, NJ, and studied with Jerome Zierling, who taught him privately as well. Shaw later made all-city and all-state orchestras, and found himself playing in the school bands during the day and gigging at night with Kenny Dorham, Hank Mobley, Tyrone Washington, and Larry Young, the latter providing him with challenging harmonic concepts.

In the early '60s, Shaw played with Eric Dolphy, and later in Paris, with Kenny Clarke, Bud Powell, Donald Byrd, and others. He replaced Carmell Jones in Horace Silver's group in 1965; jammed with Hank Mobley, Donald Byrd, and Jackie McLean from 1966-67; and played with McCoy Tyner on and off from 1968-70. He performed with Gil Evans in 1972, and Art Blakey in 1973, before joining the Louis Hayes/Junior Cook Quintet, where he assumed co-leadership with Hayes after Cook's departure. In 1976 Shaw started leading his own bands.

Although recent years have seen Woody Shaw take on the role of jazz clinician, Shaw is quick to dispel any rumor that he is eager to set aside his trumpet for a textbook. Shaw's image reveals him as a trumpeter and bandleader of considerable stature. He prefers to inspire prospective musicians with the message inherent in his music, thereby "making them aware of what is possible in the creative process."

The current Woody Shaw Quintet represents a culmination of Shaw's growth, and he emerges as a bandleader to be reckoned with. Arguably, this is his finest band, and certainly it's one of his more unusual, as evidenced by the all-brass front line. Shaw is heard primarily on trumpet and flugelhorn, occasionally on cornet; with Steve Turre (Profiled, **db**, Sep. '82) on trombone (and conch shells), the band is rounded out by pianist Mulgrew Miller, bassist Stafford James, and drummer Tony Reedus. On *United*, Shaw's fifth (and last) LP for Columbia, their group chemistry was exhibited in full force. Sadly, the record industry's economic woes prevented the album from receiving the support necessary for its success. With *Master Of The Art* the Woody Shaw Quintet has reunited with former CBS Records executive Bruce Lundvall on his new jazz label, Elektra Musician. The album features the quintet, augmented by vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson, recorded in performance at New York's Jazz Forum. Shaw speaks enthusiastically about this live recording of the group. And the fact that it succeeds in capturing the band at the apex of its performance level is yet another source of satisfaction to Woody Shaw.

Woody Shaw: It's been a challenge of mine for the past few years to get the band to such a level on record. After our six-week European tour together, we had worked up our creative capacity and technical ability to a high. It went down so smoothly and was so enjoyable, in fact, that I forgot it was a recording session.

Linda Reitman: By what criteria did you choose your present band members?

WS: I chose each member on the basis that I heard their potential, the fact that they believed in me and respected me as a leader, and the fact that I could learn from them as well. That was the key to the success of musicians like Art Blakey and Horace Silver. As a leader, you acquire and use the knowledge that you've experienced. So I go on the basis that I can teach a musician, if he lets me, but I also have to get something in return and learn from him. That's one of the keys to being a bandleader. You surround yourself with musicians who inspire you. Many people have mentioned that each member of my band is uniquely qualified to distinguish himself. Now that's something that I also demand of my musicians. I have found that the acceptance of my quintet has been overwhelming, and I believe that's partly due to the blend of trumpet and trombone. It's a very unique and innovative sound for today.

LR: Your trombonist, Steve Turre, appeared on several of your past albums before becoming a member of your present quintet. How did you find him?

WS: I met Steve in 1972, when I was residing in San Francisco, and we struck up an immediate rapport. Although he wasn't quite the player he is now, I could see it happening. Steve has been very instrumental and influential in the music that I write and record, and he's one of the few people whom I will allow to arrange my music. Steve will be one of the innovators on the instrument. I've watched this band grow during the two years it's been in existence. My pianist Mulgrew Miller is growing into a very brilliant player; Stafford James is one of the major voices of the contrabass; and I've watched Tony Reedus grow to become a phenomenal drummer. One of the characteristics of my band is that we play in many varied styles. We play in the mainstream tradition, the avant garde tradition, and we play in the bebop tradition—which is the basis of modern jazz. What I'm doing now is a culmination of all the experiences I acquired during my 10 years as a sideman. I try to use whatever I feel at the time, as well as what is apropos to the audience before me. The audience plays an important part in a musician's development, and after a while he's able to develop a rapport with them.

LR: Many people are of the opinion that bebop is old-fashioned. Do you think that your association with bebop is preventing you from being accepted by a larger audience?

WS: No, I don't, because bebop is the foundation of modern jazz. Dizzy Gillespie is still here, alive and well, to attest to that. And

many of his innovations that went on with Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, and Max Roach are still being practiced today, but in a different form. The music still lives. Although I'm not a bebop musician, *per se*, I respect all of the transitions that modern jazz has gone through. And the catalyst for my whole conception was Louis Armstrong, because he was one of the pioneers of jazz—period! I draw my needs and inspiration from the music that has happened before me, as well as what's happening now.

LR: How do you manage to keep coming up with fresh musical ideas?

WS: Again, it comes from my respect for tradition. I admire the innovations of today, but at the same time, I'm aware that there

various institutions—Berklee or whatever—they're very frustrated. This music is based on paying dues; there's more to it than just going and acquiring knowledge academically. When young musicians ask me, "Where did you learn to play jazz?" I answer, "I grew up with it." A musician is very fortunate to be able to go to some of these institutions to learn the music from a technical standpoint, but it's not all based on technical and theoretical knowledge. Its value is also very esoteric, and deals with the development of American culture. Jazz is a very highly developed form of classical music.

LR: It's interesting that you use the term "classical music" to connote jazz, because many young people are critical of the intellec-

“Woody Shaw is one of the voices of the future . . . not of the future, of the present! He has something that's different, something unique to offer. He's the guy who makes people say, 'Hey, look out, look out; here it comes.'”

—D I Z Z Y G I L L E S P I E

were others before us. I consider myself a contemporary musician, but many times I find myself running into obstacles, whereby I'm unable to compose and my playing seems stymied to a certain level. I go back and listen to the music that came before me, like Clifford Brown and Louis, and I'm able to go forward. The trumpet is the prince of horns, and I have a high esteem for it. It's a very sacred instrument. So, I find that at times I have to go back in my history to find new things. A lot of musicians have forgotten about that. We are all linked to a legacy

LR: Do you anticipate at some point experimenting with more commercial forms of music?

WS: It's like this; if I stick to my convictions, I can work for the next 20 years. If I change now, I could ruin my career. I've seen it happen to others, some of my contemporaries who are just a little older than me. By sticking to my beliefs, I'm even more strongly convinced I'm going in the right direction. As I see it, the position of jazz in the record industry is a position of longevity. It's not something you can make a quick profit from.

LR: Are you of the opinion that today's younger musicians would learn more from listening to the early innovators than they would by reading the various technical books that have gained popularity recently?

WS: Jazz, to me, is an expression of what the American black man has experienced. In recent years jazz has acquired the academic respect that it lacked some 20 years ago, but it was developed from experience. Jazz is a life style—you have to live jazz. Some of the jazz clinics that I've been involved with, with David Baker and Jamey Aebersold, have helped to introduce jazz to the layman, and it has probably been very helpful to him. But a lot of musicians find that after they've left the

tualism usually associated with classical music. I've heard some of them, in fact, pass jazz off as "chamber music."

WS: When you sit down and listen to a Beethoven symphony, you're listening in an intellectual capacity, yes? And it takes a certain amount of intellect to listen to what I'm talking about, the classic jazz, which may be contemporary or traditional. It takes a certain amount of intellect to listen to jazz, but at the same time it's highly emotional and expressive of various moods. It draws from the Afro-European experience—and that's what makes it unique—yet it's an American art form. My concern now is with promoting the legacy of the trumpet. I've tried to pass on my experiences to young musicians, like Wynton Marsalis. And this young man has greatly inspired *me*, by combining the experience of New Orleans with his academic background of Juilliard. I have a need for a young man like that, because there's a certain rivalry that goes with playing the trumpet; somewhere out there, there's always a challenger. It's a very difficult instrument to play, and it takes a certain personality to play the trumpet. I always keep my ear open for new trumpet players.

LR: Would you elaborate on what this "certain personality" is?

WS: Check out the personalities of the better trumpet players. There has to be a certain amount of confidence that goes with playing that instrument. In general, good trumpet players usually have fiery personalities, and they're usually in good physical condition, 'cause it takes a lot of physical prowess to play the instrument. I've been studying a form of Chinese exercise called Tai Chi for the past two years, and I've found that it helps enhance my physiological power on the instrument, and it also gives me better concen-



VERYL OAKLAND

WOODY SHAW SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader

- LOTUS FLOWER—Enja 4018
- MASTER OF THE ART—Elektra Musician E1-60131
- UNITED—Columbia FC 37390
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- STEPPING STONES—LIVE AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD—Columbia JC 35560
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- THE IRONMEN—Muse MR 5160
- AT THE BERLINER JAZZTAGE—Muse MR 5139
- LITTLE RED'S FANTASY—Muse MR 5103
- LOVE DANCE—Muse MR 5074
- THE MOONTRANE—Muse MR 5058
- BLACKSTONE LEGACY—Contemporary S7627/8
- SONG OF SONGS—Contemporary 7632
- WOODY III—Columbia JC 35977

with Dexter Gordon

- GREAT ENCOUNTERS—Columbia JC 35978
- SOPHISTICATED GIANT—Columbia JC 34989
- HOME COMING—Columbia PG 34650

with Art Blakey

- ANTHENAGIN—Prestige P-10076
- BUHAINA—Prestige P-10067

with Horace Silver

- HORACE SILVER—Blue Note BN-LA402-H2

with Louis Hayes/Junior Cook

- ICHI-BAN—Timeless Muse T1 307

with Bobby Hutcherson

- CIRRUS—Blue Note BN-LA257-G

with Archie Shepp

- FOR LOSERS—ABC Impulse AS 9188

WOODY SHAW'S EQUIPMENT

Woody Shaw plays a Yamaha Model YTR 6335 silver trumpet and a Yamaha Model YFH 731 silver flugelhorn. On occasion he uses a vintage Miazzi which he says "was given to me 10 years ago when I was touring Europe with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, [but] I've had it gold-plated, overhauled, and new valves put on it. I play the cornet occasionally, but I'm a trumpet player and proud of it."

tration. You need certain mental characteristics to play the trumpet. It takes a strong constitution, because there are many physical handicaps to playing the trumpet. You have to have both mental and physical prowess to play this instrument.

LR: Do you view the trumpet as more of a physical instrument or a mental instrument? Do your experiences with Tai Chi allow you a greater freedom and flexibility on the trumpet?

WS: It's a very physical instrument. It has only three valves, as opposed to 88 keys on the piano, and 22 keys on the saxophone. So, it

takes a great deal of mental concentration to play it, and to play in all of the chromatic keys, in the 12-tone theories. After practicing Tai Chi, I have found that I'm able to apply different methods for concentrating mentally and physically. I'm always searching for different venues to express myself. And you have to have a certain amount of discipline to reach that, a certain peace of mind. I haven't found it yet, but I'm looking for it. Each time that I come across it, however briefly, my creative output increases.

LR: How do you view your role as teacher, via your jazz clinics held here and in Australia?

WS: In recent years since I've become a bandleader, I've gotten away from the teacher-clinician role. I'm aware of the fact that I did inspire many young musicians coming up to learn about jazz. But I think most of the musicians who have met me or heard me are inspired by the fact that they see what I'm doing both as a leader and as a trumpeter, through my musical repertoire. My contribution is to be able to inspire and leave a message; I'm not interested in being a teacher. I'm still trying to develop as an artist myself, and all of my energies of late have gone into being a bandleader. When I leave

the bandstand, I want the audience to be aware, and not forget me.

LR: Your sound on trumpet is big, with considerable flexibility. Do you still practice various exercises, particularly the more difficult ones, or do you find that your practicing is done when you perform on-stage with your band?

WS: The latter is more suited to me. I've seen some musicians who practice all day, but when they get on the bandstand, they can't play a thing. Practice is essential, definitely, in developing any particular craft, but I find that it's best for me to play with my band as much as possible. Even when we're off, I try to rehearse this band at least twice a week, to keep in good shape. If the need arises where I'm unable to execute a phrase on-stage, I'll go home and practice it, but I don't want to practice to the point where I sound mechanical. Playing with my band is like roadwork—it keeps me in shape. My thing is being able to take what I've learned through observing and practicing, and apply it to my role as performer and bandleader.

LR: How would you describe the Woody Shaw sound?

WS: I think I'm a very intelligent, cerebral-type player, insofar as the notes I choose or the harmonic daring I use, but I also try to play with a pretty sound. Some of what I've done on trumpet has been associated with the innovations of John Coltrane, because I use more of a saxophone style, as applied to the trumpet. Saxophone players can identify with what I'm doing, because I use intervals of fourths, fifths, and pentatonic scales. I don't have a saxophone in my band now—nothing personal, it's just that I think it's time for the trumpet to be considered the major, innovative instrument. It's the prince of all horns, the most pronounced, and most profound-sounding instrument. If anything is to be announced or introduced, it's usually the trumpet that does it. There is a certain royalty associated with the trumpet and a regal quality to its sound.

LR: In an interview with Nat Hentoff conducted at the release of your *Blackstone Legacy* album, you indicated that you were trying to express what was happening in the world, and that you hoped to reach a stage of spiritual enlightenment, whereby your music would become "a light of hope, a sound of strength." That was 12 years ago. Do you still hold such views?

WS: Yes, I do. I haven't found it yet, but I'm still looking. You must always maintain a certain level of awareness of what is happening in your environment, and in the universe itself. And you must also maintain hope when observing the state of affairs in the world, because, as in all forms of art, it comes out. It comes out in the music. I just want to make my contribution to the art form and express my musical feelings and thoughts through my music. And that comes from my awareness of what is happening around me. Once I get on the bandstand—it's like the altar—it transcends all negative feelings. One-hundred percent of me goes into being a creative musician, because I want to contribute to this beautiful art form called jazz. **db**

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THE FRITH FACTOR

EXPLORATION IN SOUND



ANDY FREEBERG

"I believe that the use of noise to make music will continue and increase until we reach a music produced through the aid of electronical instruments which will make available for musical purposes any and all sounds that can be heard. . . . Whereas, in the past, the point of disagreement has been between dissonance and consonance, it will be, in the immediate future, between noise and so-called musical sounds."

—John Cage, 1937

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

SOME 30 YEARS AFTER CAGE ORIGINALLY DELIVERED THAT forward-thinking address, those same words filtered down to a young British guitarist playing folk clubs and workingmen's pubs in north England. The power of those words would forever change this youth's perceptions about what music was, and as a result would help launch the fledgling guitarist on a never-ending journey through the uncharted waters of exploratory music.

Fred Frith is truly a phenomenon. I can think of a whole string of other adjectives that would suitably apply to this 33-year-old guitarist/violinist/composer—prolific, eclectic, enigmatic, innovative, eccentric, controversial—but his great wealth of recorded music speaks for itself: 10 years and seven albums with England's pioneering progressive rock band Henry Cow, three albums with the decidedly somber and potently political trio Art Bears, a series of three guitar solo albums featuring improvised music performed on prepared guitars, two extremely diverse and highly successful studio projects for the renegade Ralph Records, plus collaborations with such groups as Material, the Residents, Etron Fou Leloublan, Massacre, and fellow innovators Brian Eno, Robert Wyatt, Bob Ostertag, and others.

And, as Frith acknowledges, the original impetus that led to this virtual explosion of creativity and expression was Cage. "Reading *Silence* when I was about 18 changed my attitude completely, far more profoundly than listening to any music ever would have. That book brought very sharply into focus the idea that sound, in and of itself, can be as important as all the pedagogical parameters that you're taught are important in music, like melody and harmony and rhythm. The sound itself is just as important. And from that notion I started viewing the guitar itself from a different point of view altogether, just to see what I could get out of it. And that led into a long period of experimentation which is still going on now."

Up to that point Frith had been a classically trained violinist-turned-blues guitarist, playing decidedly anglicized versions of *Shake Your Money Maker* with a group of school chums from his hometown of Sussex. "I started on the violin when I was five, at my father's insistence, but I kind of gave that up for the guitar when I was about 13. What happened was I went away to school, and there I saw a group that was imitating a popular band of the day called the Shadows, which was kind of England's answer to the Ventures. Anyway, I was completely entranced at once and decided immediately that I would have to start to learn guitar. I was so determined that I went out and got a book called *One Hundred Chords* and learned every single one so that I could get into a band too."

That first group, the Chaperones, was basically another Ventures clone band, but it suddenly went through some changes when the first inklings of black music began flowing into England around 1964. "There was a period when we were playing either Shadows or Beatles tunes, then there was a sudden changeover when I heard Snooks Eaglin and Alexis Korner, the first blues players I ever heard. Korner was the guy who more or less introduced blues to a wide audience in England. He originally had Charlie Watts and Mick Jagger in his band before the Stones formed, and they were doing tunes by all the classic black American blues players like Muddy Waters. From that point I started buying all the American blues records that the stores could import, and so we more or less changed into a blues band by the time I was 15."

Besides being the avid blues fan that he was, young Frith was also listening hungrily to anything and everything that had guitar in it, picking up bits of folk, ragtime, classical, and flamenco techniques. "I was simultaneously listening to John Williams, Wes Montgomery, Les Paul, and B.B. King. The first John Renbourn album I learned note for note. It was one of my favorite records. Technically, I was a jack-of-all-trades, just copying everything immaculately, kind of making these soulless copies of all my heroes. I taught myself some of the classical repertoire and flamenco. I did some finger-picking on rural blues stuff, and I did the whole Eric Clapton electric blues thing—and at the same time I was never particularly good at any of it."

Clearly Frith was searching for his own voice on the instrument, absorbing as many influences as he could, then trying to assimilate them into his own style. Eastern music was also in the air around this time, so to balance his diet of blues music, Frith also began listening to Indian, Japanese, and Balinese music a lot, gradually incorporating ragas into his guitar repertoire. It was around this period, sometime in 1967, that the evolving young guitarist happened onto the philosophies of John Cage. "I met a guy in a blues club in Cambridge the first day I was up at the university, and he gave me this copy of *Silence*, which more or less changed my whole direction overnight. I suddenly became aware of a lot of things that I hadn't even thought about before."

Another landmark influence that Frith happened onto almost simultaneously was Frank Zappa. While he was intrigued with Cage's notions of chance operations and the principle of indeterminacy in music composition, he was equally taken with Zappa's example of using the medium of rock music in more substantial ways than had been previously done by any other group. "The thing about Zappa was he was one of the first to really use the studio to its full potentials, and that was fascinating to me. *Absolutely Free* and *Freak Out* were like revelations. . . . there was all kinds of fertile stuff going on there that really made an impact on me at the time. I heard some real substance in his music and saw the possibility of being able to really go a long way in the medium. I guess part of me had this kind of snobbery because I had classical training and I had always been led to believe that some kinds of music were more important than others. But when I heard Zappa, it had a very important effect on me on two levels. One was that it made me think that rock music was just as important and serious a medium as anything else—that it gave you the possibility of doing worthwhile, interesting compositional work at the same time as having a lot of fun doing it, which seemed to be not a bad idea. So that helped get me away from this idea of middle class respectability, which I was fighting against anyway. And I guess the other thing about Zappa that affected me was the political content, the fact that there was a way of reconciling one's political beliefs with one's actual work."

Pooling these significant influences, Frith soon formed the group Henry Cow in 1968 with fellow university student Tim Hodgkinson, a sax player who at the time was more heavily influenced by the music of Charles Mingus and John Coltrane than any rock music. It was an eclectic mix, an inspired pairing of equally open-minded musicians, and the beginning of what would become England's most radical, enduring rock collective. Besides performing hundreds of concerts and recording six albums with Virgin Records in England, the members of Henry Cow also took a united militant stance against the music industry. "We used to advocate independence for musicians taking control of their own lives, not having managers, not having too much to do with record companies, primarily working by and for themselves. For the 10-year duration of Henry Cow, we were responsible for all aspects of our own affairs, from the performance and recording of our music to self-sufficiency in equipment, transportation, management, and administration."

This politically committed outfit, espousing dialectical materialist attitudes and Marxist theorizing in their many interviews with the English press, hoped that their music would suggest action towards a change in the system. As drummer Chris Cutler stated in a 1975 interview with *Melody Maker* magazine: "Sure, it's not musicians like us who are going to ferment revolution any more than it's students. Social change, inevitably, is going to come from the working class, from the mass of the proletariat. . . . but you can work in this curious area of art and make progress in that area."

Perhaps the culmination of their political efforts was the formation of

FRED FRITH'S EQUIPMENT

Since Fred Frith's repertoire is so eclectic, shoring an interest in both structured and unstructured music as well as ethnic music, his arsenal of instruments is likewise diverse, with specific instruments suited to specific musical forms.

He uses two different guitars for the various kinds of structured music he plays in concert and on record. For the more refined, subdued stuff (like the lovely waltz ballad *Domaine De Planoussat* on the *Speechless* LP or much of his material on the lilting *Gravity* LP), he uses a Gibson 345, affecting a warmer, singing quality. For the heavier, grating kind of rock & roll sound he works with groups like *Massacre* or *Material*, Frith uses an old 1961 solid body Burns guitar, created by the British craftsman Jim Burns. As Frith explained, "This guitar has a totally different sensibility than the Gibson 345. It's very noisy and it has this unique tremolo arm, which is probably the best that was ever made. It's very, very sturdy, stays in tune incredibly well, and I can get a lot of feedback with it."

For some of his unstructured music (including his collaboration with Henry Kaiser on *With Friends Like These*), he uses a rather raw-looking, double-neck created for him by a friend named Charles Fletcher. "It was the one and only guitar that he ever built," says Frith. "He constructed it mainly out of old pieces from other guitars that I had, and for the body I think he used an old door." One of the necks is a conventional six-string while the other is an eight-string. This is the guitar that Frith would lie out flat on a table for his improvising concerts and attack with any number of found objects. However, he has recently discarded this instrument for performances in favor of the homemade stringed instruments he has built himself. Basically, they are slabs of square wood, perhaps three-quarters of an inch in thickness, on which he has mounted a pickup, a bridge, and some strings stretched over metal screws. "The basic design of the instrument is supposed to be as rudimentary and flexible as possible," he says, "so I can use an electric drill to bore holes into the body of it to achieve certain sounds, and if I run out of wood I can just get another piece exactly the same. It only takes about five minutes to reconstruct it." Frith plans to use three of these homemade instruments along with several homemade percussion instruments for his next solo project for Ralph Records, which he plans to record on low-level technology (probably a four-track system) in the privacy of his NYC home.

In addition, Frith also owns (but seldom plays anymore) an acoustic guitar made in Seville, Spain, and he has the 1936 Gibson K-11, which he prepared and used on the landmark *Guitar Solos* LP in 1974. Other instruments in his collection include "a rather nice French xylophone, a very cheap English violin, and an even cheaper Chinese viola." Currently he is creating a series of percussion instruments made from biscuit tins and doweling rods.

For amplification on-stage and in terms of other electronic devices, ranging from mixers to pedals, he has always favored H-H products. "It's an English company that I think is very good. They put out some of the best amplifiers on the market, but they are pretty hard to find in the States. I've been using H-H stuff since 1970, and I really like it a lot."

As for picks . . . don't ask! Frith has used everything from egg beaters to bookends to attack the strings, more for the sound quality that each item produces than for the inherent theatricality of it. "It's more to do with my interest in found objects and the use of certain kinds of textures which have an effect on the string . . . the difference between the touch of stone, the touch of glass, the touch of wood, the touch of paper—those kinds of basic elements that you're using against the surface of the strings which produce different sounds."

FRED FRITH SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader		with Material	
GUITAR SOLOS—Caroline C-1508	MEMORY SERVES—Elektra Musician		
GRAVITY—Ralph Records 8057	EI-60042		
SPEECHLESS—Ralph Records 8106		with the Residents	
with Henry Cow		SUBTERRANEAN MODERN—Ralph	
LEGEND—Red Records 001	Records SM-7908	COMMERCIAL ALBUM—Ralph Records	
LIVE AT DINGWALL'S DANCEHALL—	Greasy Truckers GT 4997	R2-8052-L	
UNREST—Red Records 002		with Brian Eno	
DESPERATE STRAIGHTS—Virgin	MUSIC FOR FILMS—Editions EG 105	BEFORE AND AFTER SCIENCE—Edi-	
V-2024	tions EG-Eno 4		
IN PRAISE OF LEARNING—Red Records		with Henry Kaiser	
003		WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE—Meta-	
CONCERTS—Caroline CD 3002		language 107	
WESTERN CULTURE—Broadcast BC1		with Eugene Chadbourne	
		THE ENGLISH CHANNEL—Parachute	
with Art Bears		P007	
HOPES AND FEARS—Red Records 004		with various artists	
WINTER SONGS—Ralph Records 7905		GUITAR SOLOS II—Caroline C-1508	
THE WORLD AS IT IS TODAY—Red Rec-		GUITAR SOLOS III—Red Records 008	
ords 6622			
with Massacre			
KILLING TIME—Celluloid 6597			

Rock In Opposition, a collective of like-minded groups from other European countries which struggled with the task of getting their revolutionary music heard. As writer Steve Lake put it in a 1975 *Melody Maker* interview with the group: "They've displayed an explicit disregard for the conventions of the rock biz. They deny charges that their music is inaccessible, and they remain convinced that music such as theirs can be of value and interest to a wide audience, if that audience can be confronted with it as an alternative to the majority of rock music, which Frith describes as shit."

By the time Henry Cow broke up in 1978, partly due to what Frith calls "a divergence of tendencies" between band members, he had already been involved in a number of other musical endeavors on the side. Apart from Henry Cow, which played a very eclectic brand of highly orchestrated, structured music, Frith was also beginning to dabble in unstructured music, drawing more directly on the Cagian ideas of prepared instruments and chance composition. In 1974, right around the time that Henry Cow had released its second of six albums for Virgin, he initiated the *Guitar Solos* LP series, featuring players who were changing and developing the possible languages of the instrument. On that first album in the series of three, Frith unveiled a haunting collection of improvised music on prepared guitar which must have stunned listeners of the day. Even today that album stands up as uniquely innovative and undeniably daring.

This record of unaccompanied guitar solos, cut in four days with no overdubs at the Kaleidophon Studios in London, features Frith playing a curiously customized 1936 Gibson K-11. For one thing, he added an extra pickup over the strings at the nut, which enabled him to amplify the sound being produced on both sides of a fretted note. Then he split the fingerboard in two by putting a capo on the 12th fret, in essence dividing the guitar into separable units—the bottom part of the neck, which is amplified by the nut pickup, and the length of string above the capo, which is amplified by the normal two pickups of this stereo Gibson K-11. With this setup, Frith hammers on notes with the fingers of each hand, the left hand playing the bottom half of the fingerboard while the right hand independently plays the higher portion of the fingerboard on the other side of the capo. (Ironically, this method of hammering on notes independently with each hand has recently become known as "The Eddie Van Halen Technique," though Frith was clearly playing in this way when Van Halen was still a formative garage band playing cover tunes in small L.A. clubs.)

To this unconventional setup, Frith added the placement of alligator clips on certain parts of the strings to further separate the instrument into yet more units. As he explains, "By placing the clips in-between the two regular pickups—the ones above the capo—you're then effectively rendering three clear and distinctly separate sounds which you can channel into a mixer and have indefinite points of the stereo spectrum, so that they appear to be coming from different points in space, although you're actually dealing with the same sound source."

On the piece *No Birds*, from that revolutionary album of guitar solos in 1974, Frith actually played two guitars simultaneously, both prepared in this extraordinary manner. The results are astounding, effectively recreating the timbre and range of an entire orchestra . . . with no overdubs at all! "That was actually the first time I ever used the technique of laying out two guitars flat on a table, neck to neck so that the bodies of the guitars are on opposite ends and the necks are quite close together running parallel. And the way the piece was constructed was that I tuned all the strings on both guitars to one note. And because both were stereo guitars and both had nut pickups, I was dealing with six separate sound sources coming from each guitar, with volume pedals on maybe three of them, so that by filtering in and out on the volume pedals, I could alter the sound a little without actually doing anything on the instrument at all. So I started from that parameter and gradually de-tuned the strings as the piece was in progress.

"That was the first time I used that setup, and subsequently it was the way I normally gave concerts for years. All my solo concerts, up until last year, consisted of guitars laid out flat in that way and manipulated with all kinds of attachments. But now I've more or less discarded the guitar altogether for solo concerts in favor of homemade instruments, which are more portable and have a wider variety of range. I can make them sound like a koto or many other ethnic-sounding instruments, as well as like a guitar."



*Skeleton Crew—
"three one-man
bands in one unit"—
from left: Tom Cora,
cello and some kind
of drum; Dave
Newhouse,
saxophones and
snare drum; and
Fred Frith, guitars,
bass drum, and hi-
hat.*

*Photo by
Andy Freeberg*

In an issue of *Shades*, a Canadian music magazine, writer Paul Wilson described the scene at a recent Frith solo concert: "He has two guitars, both somewhat battered. One is a double-neck, the other is a standard six-string. There is an array of rummage-sale paraphernalia on the table, including a box of school chalk, finger cymbals of various sizes, bags of rice and barley, a glass of water, a restaurant salt shaker, paintbrushes and screwdrivers, scotch tape, string, a bottle of ball bearings, drumsticks of various types, a set of brass knuckles, a musical triangle, an electric metronome, several toy animals (the kind that hop around when you wind them up), a cluster of jingle bells, spools of thread, a tin whistle, a scrub brush, and so on. With great deliberation and presence, Fred Frith uses all these things to play the guitars—or more precisely, to extract sounds out of them. He drops various objects on the strings, pounds them with drum sticks, whips them with strings, strokes them with a violin bow, scrapes them with twine, lets mechanical frogs hop up and down on the neck . . . so that gradually a composition of highly crafted sound emerges."

Frith employed many of these same unorthodox techniques on two followup albums in the *Guitar Solos* series in 1976 and 1978, collaborating with such improvising artists as Henry Kaiser, Eugene Chadbourne, Derek Bailey, Hans Reichel, and others. In 1979 he continued the practice of documenting these improvising concerts by releasing *With Friends Like These* (Metalanguage), a duo with Kaiser. Again, the sounds from these two improvising artists playing prepared guitars is highly experimental and is probably considered highly inaccessible as well. But this penchant for so-called avant garde or unstructured music is only one side of this multi-faceted musician.

It seems that Frith constantly is involved with satellite projects, as if to continually replenish his musical ideas and satisfy his desire to play both structured and unstructured music. And rather than isolating his avant garde approach from his more rock-oriented outlets such as Massacre or his current touring trio, Skeleton Crew, he integrates them. And to satisfy his ongoing political interests, he has the Art Bears, a recording group that actually splintered off from Henry Cow in 1978 with the release of *Hopes And Fears*, followed by *Winter Songs* in 1979, and the exceedingly dark, foreboding statement on *The World As It Is Today*, released in 1980.

"The first Art Bears record was originally begun as a Henry Cow record, and it was as a result of disagreements about whether this record should really be a Henry Cow record or not that the Art Bears really came into existence. The two groups coexisted for a while, although the Art Bears never existed except to make records. It wasn't a gigging group the way Henry Cow was. We still theoretically exist, basically to make a record every other year."

The music of the Art Bears is fairly simple and is structured around the lyrics of drummer Chris Cutler, as sung by Dagmar Krause. Of their gloomy view of the world on *The World As It Is Today*, Frith says,

"It's about as extreme as I can go in one direction. I kind of feel that it's of limited value in the end to make something as dark as that. Basically, it's not exactly a happy record, although I think it's a very powerful record. But to make something as consistently pessimistic as that is a responsibility that I wouldn't want to take too often, because it doesn't actually encourage people to do anything about the situation. The only justification for making a record like that is that it might shake people up enough to get up and do something. But I think the effect that it actually has, against what we'd prefer, is that it makes people have a little thrill about how bad everything is, which makes them feel good in an obscure way . . . to revel in the apocalypse—it's a kind of hobby that a lot of people seem to have these days. But I can't see much point in making music at all unless it's got some element of the positive in it. If it would be possible to make a music that would lift people up and at the same time help them to commit themselves to changing things, that would be very nice. And I don't know how to do it, but I think it's something worth trying."

On the extreme other end of the spectrum from this very bleak attitude expressed by the Art Bears is Frith's truly joyous solo LP, *Gravity*, a collection of dance music assimilated from cultures around the world. Recorded in 1979, it's the first in a series of five projects that Frith will do for Ralph Records. (Frith mentioned that a double album of improvised music he performed in Japan last summer with several Japanese musicians will be released by Christmas. And there's another duo record with Henry Kaiser already in the planning stages, as well as a fourth Art Bears album coming up.) With *Gravity*, Frith sets a distinctly happy tone, highlighted by the upbeat, slightly bizarre remake of *Dancing In The Street* and the Middle Eastern folk dance quality of *Hands Of The Juggler*. It's an extremely warm, almost whimsical album, exploring the essence of what makes people from around the world dance.

"I've spent the last six or seven years listening to music from other cultures, particularly Eastern European music. I never deliberately set out to copy any of it or never sat down to notate any of it; it's more like just letting it all wash over me, and later on it comes out in certain ways in my music. I've been very influenced by Greek and Bulgarian music, in particular. But on *Gravity* I kind of mixed up all these musics from various cultures to make new songs out of them." On a tune like *Spring Any Day Now*, for example, Frith melds a bossa nova rhythm with a melody line that is distinctly North African to create a sound that is unique and refreshing. On *Don't Cry For Me* he blends Greek mandolin sounds with heavy metal guitar bashing; on *A Career In Real Estate* he captures the lilting charm of a Scottish fiddle tune; and *Slap Dance* affects a Serbian folk romp. As one critic put it, "Whereas Henry Cow music often seems afflicted with a sonorous melancholy, Frith's compositions here are joyous, energetic, sometimes even light-hearted, as though he were in love."

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WARNE MARSH'S INNER MELODY

BY FRANCIS DAVIS



TALK ABOUT WARNE MARSH—OR TALK with him—and sooner or later the subject of Lennie Tristano enters the discussion and begins to dominate it. The tenor saxophonist remembers making his recording debut as a member of a Tristano sextet in March 1949, when he was 21, but the recollection of his second recording session, just two months later, is even more vivid. Indeed, it is unlikely

that anyone interested in jazz, whether he was there that day or not, will ever forget the session at which pianist Tristano had his group improvise two titles—*Intuition* and *Digression*—without specifying keys, chord progressions, time signatures, or even tempos up-front.

"It was at the end of the session," Marsh recalls, "Lennie had gotten us together—me,

Lee Konitz, Billy Bauer, who was the guitarist, and the bass player Arnold Fishkin—and explained to us that we were going to improvise strictly from what we heard one another doing. The only thing that was set was the order of entrances, with Lennie starting off—setting the tempo and the mood—that and the fact that we'd play for three minutes, because we were making 78s. So we would give each other approximately 15 or 20 seconds and then come in. . . ."

Marsh wasn't caught off guard by Tristano's instructions. "This was normal for us. We had practiced it some and done it in clubs, and this was our second date together for Capitol, so we were ready. When I listen to those sides now, I'm amazed at how far ahead Lennie was, at what great music he was playing. And it's free improvising—free, right straight off the top of his head."

More than 30 years after the events Warne Marsh describes, and more than four years after the pianist's death in 1978, Tristano's rank in modern jazz and his role in its evolution remain points of great contention. The problem the critic inevitably encounters with Tristano is that he seems at once major and peripheral. He was a trailblazer, as Marsh's comments suggest, but he can hardly be hailed as an innovator, for few among the jazz rank and file chose to follow his path. Certainly, the somber, ruminative music that five men, chastened by their leader's stern piano intro, collectively and somewhat tentatively improvised in the Capitol studio that evening in 1949 bears little resemblance to free jazz as we understand that term today, in the fiery wake of Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor. But just as certainly, Tristano's music can stand on its own abundant merit, all questions of historical precedence aside, and Tristano should at least be credited with formulating both a profound and wholly original system of improvisation based upon the riddle of license and self-denial, and more important perhaps, a school of thought to go along with it. Tristano's theories about jazz reach their apotheosis not so much in his playing as in his teachings, and in the playing of two disciples who continue to spread his gospel—saxophonists Lee Konitz and Warne Marsh.

The sins of the father, both real and imagined, are often visited upon his sons, even in jazz, and those who found Tristano's music rhythmically stillborn and too cerebral were quick to mark Konitz and Marsh as dispassionate, inhibited players. Konitz threw off that onus early on, soloing heatedly and brilliantly in almost every conceivable jazz context. But Marsh, who has remained secluded in the folds of the Tristano legend to a great extent, ironically achieving a high level of visibility only when he reunited with Tristano or Konitz, has never really been able to shake the curse. Never fully accepted by the boppers, he has been cited as a patriarch of free improvisation by avant garde saxophonist and composer Anthony Braxton, who has dedicated at least one piece to him. Yet Marsh, whose musical values are deeply rooted in the flowing rhythm of Lester Young

and the harmonic vocabulary of Charlie Parker, expresses little interest in the activities of the post-Coleman avant garde and, in any event, it is impossible to imagine him soloing in an AACM-like context. If the younger generation of jazz listeners knows Marsh at all, it is by reputation or by the well-received two-tenor records he made in the late '70s with Lew Tabackin (*Tenor Gladness*) and Peter Christlieb (*Apogee*)—records which Marsh himself, a perfectionist in the Tristano mold, both arrogant and insecure about his own abilities, does not particularly like.

Laboring in relative obscurity, however, Marsh has matured into one of the most stimulating improvisers in all of jazz. His cool, liquid style is spiked with paradox. Playing a standard pop song, he will frequently dissolve its melody completely in an attempt to isolate and purify the song's harmonic base. Yet the new melodies he stretches over its chords are appealing and memorable in their own right, and the *idea* of melody is something he bears proudly and carefully aloft, as though it were a sacred chalice from which he were determined not to spill one precious drop. If he is a melodic player, however, he is not really a lyrical one in the conventional sense—his tone is one of the palest and brittlest in jazz. He has a knack for rhythmic displacement, and he uses silence and space almost as tellingly, if not as mischievously, as did Thelonious Monk—he speaks of “the ability to *play* the rests and give *them* meaning too.” But because he is not a virile, breast-beating swinger, many of his rhythmic niceties are lost on all but his most attentive and most sophisticated audiences. Above all else, there is an inner-directed quality to Marsh's best solos, a feeling of rigorous soul-searching as riveting as that which one hears in Coltrane, but quite different in character. There is nothing purgative, nothing Promethean or sheerly physical about Marsh's solos. Instead, one hears in them what critic Harvey Pekar has described as “the kind of intense concentration a scientist must feel when deeply involved in his work.” It is this quality of passionate intellectual involvement, no doubt, which draws some listeners to Marsh at the same time it keeps larger numbers—seeking simpler, more immediate pleasures from jazz—away.

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When Warne Marsh is playing, even his most abstract thoughts seem tangible—the notes seem to float in captions above the bell of his horn. In conversation, he is harder to read. Once a student of Lennie Tristano's, Marsh is now a teacher himself, commuting three days a week from his home in “a nice conservative Connecticut small town” to the one-room efficiency in the Broadway resident hotel where he sees his students. The first impression a stranger might get from Marsh is that he is guarded and rather distant. But it soon becomes apparent that he is painfully shy, almost jittery, as he paces around the small disordered room, lighting cigarettes he lets burn out, pouring coffee he doesn't finish, repeatedly adjusting the mouthpiece

on the tenor saxophone that stands idle next to a drum set in the center of the floor. A slightly built man whose dark hair is just beginning to turn grey at the temples and on the chin as he enters his mid-50s, giving him a slightly wispy look, Marsh answers questions slowly and thoughtfully, not venturing on to the next word until he is absolutely certain it is the word he wants.

Marsh grew up in Los Angeles in a family which cherished music. “My mother's musical through her fingertips. She's from that Russian-Jewish tradition where, hopefully, the first son will be a musician. But in this case, my mother was the first born, and the first son was not playing the violin, not at all, so she just walked in and took over. In the early '20s she played in the string quartets rich Hollywood actors would hire to accompany the premieres of their silent movies. I was *her* first son, so it came true there.” But instead of violin, Marsh studied accordion, switching to tenor saxophone in his mid-teens.

“Like Charlie Parker out of Ben Webster,” Marsh replies when I ask him what he sounded like as a teenager. “I've got a tape someone sent me from when I was 19 years old in the army at Camp Lee, Virginia—a

WARNE MARSH'S EQUIPMENT

Warne Marsh plays a 56000 series Selmer Mark VI tenor saxophone, manufactured in 1956—“the second year of Mark VIs”—and he has owned it “around 10 years.” He uses #3 Rico reeds, stiff or clipped, and either a #5 hard rubber Otto Link mouthpiece or a #6 Guy Hawkins, “which has a shallower chamber than the #5, so it has a higher frequency sound. It's noisier, it carries a bit more. I cannot play as articulately on it as I can on the #5, but I know I'm going to be heard. I still go back and forth.”

tape of the Special Services band we were in. But Tex Beneke was my very first inspiration. I was in a kid band that played for servicemen and young people at the Hollywood Canteen during World War II. We had Glenn Miller stock charts, with Tex's solos written out, plus the harmony was given. I heard him on the radio quite a bit—'43, '44—his records were very popular. You know, young big bands—what were they *going* to play? Besides the white band charts, maybe some Duke Ellington. I was already playing *Body And Soul* by Hawkins and Ben's solo on *Cottontail*. My ambition was to become a studio musician. In Hollywood that's the only way you're encouraged to think. By 17 I was serious, but what I was offered included no real jazz as a career. If you wanted jazz, you left L.A. and went to New York. It was quite clear-cut then.”

The apprenticeship at the Canteen led to a job on CBS radio backing Hoagy Carmichael. But by the time he was 19, Marsh was in uniform himself, and it was through trumpeter Don Ferrera, a fellow G.I., that he heard about Lennie Tristano. When he was transferred to Fort Mammoth, New Jersey, Marsh began formal study with the blind pianist.

Tristano changed Marsh's listening habits.

“I became disenchanted with Duke's band when I realized that no two saxophone players in that section played with the same vibrato.” He began listening even more closely to Charlie Parker, and “I began hearing Lester Young, and really fell for his manner, on a quite conscious level.

“Now that I look back on my studies with Lennie, though, I have to admit that I came to him with my own feeling for a melody, my own way of playing. What he taught me was that you don't have to imitate your heroes or your idols. You have to accept the responsibility of your own melody.

“Lenny always knew me at least two years better than I knew myself. I mean, he could sit and listen and tell me what was original and what was derivative. I doubt my personal education would have ever gotten to where it has without him, because he presented it all so clearly to me when I was 20 that I've never really been at a loss for ideas since, and if I want more ideas, I know from him exactly where to look—to 20th century classical thinking, which is best heard in Bartok. It's a compound of 19th century thinking, which is to say you can take the most advanced conventional harmony and meter and rhythm and begin compounding them, which is what the best composers have done in this century. Just add harmonies to harmonies, meters to meters, which is being done in jazz, and rhythms to rhythms—poly-rhythms—which has been done better in jazz than in composition.

“Lenny really knew music. My life would be a lot different if I had never met him. For one thing, I probably would never have taught.”

• • •

Marsh began teaching by giving saxophone lessons to children and adult beginners in a Pasadena music store when he and his wife moved back to California in 1966. During his 10-year sojourn out west, he was also a founding member of Med Flory's Supersax, a group whose five-man saxophone section played reharmonized Charlie Parker solos. “Getting into Bird again was really meaningful at first,” Marsh says, but ultimately, the experience was frustrating to Marsh (and to his fans) because he never got to solo on any of the group's records. “On jobs, everybody blew. Med's a democrat, but he's also a conservative . . . he's probably a Republican . . . and his thinking on the albums was that we should keep it to the format of the original records—trumpet solo, piano solo, and transcribed Parker solos by the whole section—no improvising by the saxes.”

Returning to New York in the mid-'70s, he began his teaching career in earnest. When I ask Marsh how his teaching philosophy differs from Tristano's, he replies “It doesn't. I feel I was so well-trained, [that] it's a simple matter to turn around and give that training to someone else.” The method involves “a lot of ear training at first—listening to records, transcribing solos, a lot of that. One of the first things I expect them [students] to be able to do is to present a melody in a convincing manner. The next step is learning to im-



WARNE MARSH SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

as a leader
 HOW DEEP, HOW HIGH—Discovery 863
 WARNE OUT—Interplay 7709
 ALL MUSIC—Nessa 7
 NE PLUS ULTRA—Revelation 12
 THE ART OF IMPROVISING—Revelation 22
 THE ART OF IMPROVISING VOL. 2—Revelation 27
 LIVE IN HOLLYWOOD—Xanadu 151
 RELEASE RECORD, SEND TAPE—Wave 6
 JAZZ FROM THE EAST VILLAGE—Wave 10

with Lennie Tristano
 CROSSCURRENTS—Capital M-11060
 LIVE AT BIRDLAND 1949—Jazz 1

with Lee Konitz
 FIRST SESSIONS—Prestige 24081
 JAZZ EXCHANGE VOL. 1—Storyville 4001
 JAZZ EXCHANGE VOL. 2—Storyville 4026
 LONDON CONCERT—Wave 16
 KONITZ MEETS MARSH AGAIN—Pausa 7019
 KONITZ AND MARSH—English Atlantic 50296

with Lew Tabackin
 TENOR GLADNESS—Inner City 6048

with Pete Christlieb
 APOGEE—Warner Bros. 3236

with Supersax
 PLAYS BIRD—Capitol 11177
 BIRD WITH STRINGS—Capitol 11371
 CHASIN' THE BIRD—Pausa 7038

with Clare Fischer
 'T WAS ONLY YESTERDAY—Discovery 798
 REPORT OF THE FIRST ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON
 RELAXED IMPROVISATION—Revelation 17

with Art Pepper
 THE WAY IT WAS—Contemporary 6730

with Bill Evans
 CROSSCURRENTS—Fantasy 9568

with Joe Albany
 THE RIGHT COMBINATION—Riverside 6071

provisé on that melody, and it becomes necessary to get into the other notes—the harmony—but it all proceeds from a melody." As Tristano did with him, he has his instrumental students sing their exercises before attempting them on their instruments. "A musician who can't use his voice!" Lennie used to say. "How can that be?"

* * *

With the emergence of Tristano and his coterie in the mid-'40s, jazz entered the age of anxiety. Lee Konitz once said of Warne

Marsh, "He's had a big emotional thing going on within himself, and sometimes what he plays isn't what he's capable of, because he has trouble releasing his emotion. It's some kind of fear of breaking loose. But when he does, it's really something to hear, I tell you." And Marsh himself has said of Charlie Parker, "Bird was able to get to the point where he played all music. I mean he got outside of himself by going through himself and eliminating everything in his personal character that might tend to distort his music."

What character armor did Marsh have to shed before he could get in touch with his feelings and create to his full capacity? "Fear," he laughs nervously. Fear of what? "Fear of really expressing myself. It's not exactly encouraged in American life. It leaves you exposed, but that can be your strength too. I got over it once and for all around 1963 or '64. I just felt like playing all the time." And he hadn't felt like playing all the time before that? "No."

Has the musician's life Marsh created for himself been easy or difficult? "Oh, I've had a wonderful life. I've had a lot of opportunity, a lot of work. There's a world of music I'm proud to be a part of, with the people I still consider my heroes—Bach, Bartok, Charlie Parker, Lennie, Lester." Does he ever wish he had pursued fame more aggressively? "Not in the least. I'm not oriented that way. I've got only the one career I've got. I've done mainly one thing for 30 years—music, my own music."

"Some of the best careers aren't very lucrative, though," Marsh admits. In California in the late '60s, faced with supporting a family for the first time in his life, Marsh supplemented his earnings from music by performing manual labor, but he is not bitter about the experience, describing a job as a tv repair man as "paying four or five dollars an hour, great money in those days," and a job cleaning swimming pools as "a nice job outdoors." In New York most of his income derives from teaching. If he has one regret, it seems to be that the close-knit, racially integrated jazz community he found in Manhattan when he first arrived in 1947 has been torn asunder—he speaks of Birdland as if it were Eden, and there is a sense of loss in his voice when he describes "a gig in Queens, a dance sponsored by probably a Communist front organization, Youth for America or something like that, for \$75 cash. Me, Bird, I think Kai Winding, and Red Rodney, the four of us plus rhythm. A casual, you know? Jazz casuals, we used to call them."

I suspect it frustrates Marsh that circumstance prevents him from playing in front of audiences as much as he would like to—four weeks or so a year at the Village Vanguard, scattered concerts around New York and New Jersey, and the occasional European tour must only whet his appetite. He has said: "At some point, you have to be prepared to create—to perform. It's vital, man, if we're talking about jazz, the original jazz, the performing art. It fulfills its meaning only when you play it live in front of an audience." Still, I will agree with him that he has created a wonderful life for himself. He hasn't always been able to call his own tune, and he has sometimes had to pay the piper, taking menial day jobs which at least afforded him the luxury of playing only the music he loved and could be proud to call his own. But he has always faced the music—he has accepted the responsibility of his own melody—and that melody is an eternal and individual one which has thrilled and enlightened everyone who has listened closely enough to hear it. And however long it took to come, it finally came right straight off the top of his head. **db**

Howard Johnson

C e n t e r o f g r a v i t y



DARRYL PITT

B y L e e J e s k e

"WHEN I FIRST CAME TO NEW YORK, PEOPLE WOULD TRY TO keep me from sitting in at places, and play tricks on me and stuff, or call really hard tunes or really fast tunes. And I was ready to play. I didn't come here to ask anybody for any dispensation for it being a tuba."

In the 20 years that Howard Johnson has been in New York, he has certainly built a firm reputation—playing with the likes of Gil Evans, Archie Shepp, Muhal Richard Abrams, Charles Mingus, and Oliver Nelson; doing horn arrangements for Taj Mahal, the Band, John Lennon, B. B. King, Paul Butterfield, and others; playing in, and at one time leading, the *Saturday Night Live* band; leading two highly acclaimed bands of his own, Sub-Structure and Gravity—yet Howard Johnson has never made an album as a leader. The reason, he says, is obvious; it's the same reason people tried to pull tricks on him on the bandstand and the same reason people used to guffaw when he climbed up on-stage: it's the tuba.

"When you're dealing with a tuba," he says in his Manhattan loft, "you're dealing with very much a second-class citizen. All the liberation rhetoric that there is—black liberation, women's liberation—all that rhetoric fits the tuba: it's lazy, all those things. There really is a prejudice against it; it's very much an underdog and people just don't apply whatever vision they have to it. I have to let it not get to me. Ten years ago if you could play *Mary Had A Little Lamb*, you could get over on the tuba, because expectations were so low. So if you stand up there and play *Cherokee* with everybody else, you're over

already. In fact, that's one of the problems—you can get over so easily that you have to really check yourself out, otherwise you can get really lazy, 'cause people tend to be really astounded by almost *anything* that can happen: if you play with a nice tone, they're astounded; if you play high, they're astounded; if you play fast, they're astounded; if you play melodic and sweet, it's like, 'Wow!'

"It's just a musical instrument that's been played very badly, and for some pretty good reasons, too. First of all, it's not a very old instrument—it's only about 140 years old. And it's taken this long for people to figure out what to play on it—how to play it, what it can do. What it *can* do is play long tones and get a noble, beautiful sound. It kind of astounded people while they heard it, and they just went on to the next thing, and it never became part of their lives. I want people to think of the tuba as another musical instrument that they relate to like any other."

Obviously some people are listening. This very evening Howard Johnson and Gravity are playing to a packed house in Greenwich Village's Sweet Basil—including one woman celebrating her 71st birthday. The audience is appreciative and attentive as the band rips through its repertoire: a couple of originals, *Yesterdays*, Oliver Nelson's *Stolen Moments*, and such. And not a titter is heard from the audience. Not a smirk is seen. And *that* is something, because Gravity is made up of six tubas and a rhythm section.

In 1968 Gravity began as Sub-Structure, a band comprised of players like Bob Stewart and Dave Barger and Jack Jeffers—guys who, like Johnson, were doing most of their tuba playing in the kind of establishments that featured cornball dixieland played on washboards and banjos by grown men wearing styrofoam hats, with garters around their biceps. Sub-Structure played wherever it could

but, let's face it, the club owners of New York weren't gobbling up tuba ensembles. A number of the players went on to more lucrative things—Barger joined Blood, Sweat and Tears, and Johnson assembled Taj Mahal's renowned four-tuba band with Stewart, Earl McIntyre, and Joe Daley. But the itch to play jazz on that lugubrious instrument never left, so in 1977 Gravity was born from the ashes of Sub-Structure.

"The reason we changed the name," says Johnson, "was that, first of all, nobody could remember quite Sub-*what*: Sub-terranean? Sub-standard? Everything but Sub-Structure. And the other thing is that people began to associate it with failure. People would say, 'Yeah, too bad that band never made it,' but you kind of had the feeling that they were *glad* the band never made it. It was like, 'Keep that failure away from me,' so we changed it to Gravity."

Gravity got off the ground with a free concert in Central Park, followed by a couple of theater and club engagements in New York, and a tour of Europe. They also appeared on *Saturday Night Live* in 1978, a gig which, says Johnson, generated "the most favorable mail they had ever gotten for a band, up to that time. In fact, they got mostly hate mail for the bands on *Saturday Night Live*; the mail always said, 'Why don't you let the show band play, if you've got to have music, instead of those rock bands.' But the mail for Gravity was the most mail they ever got on a band, and it all said, 'That's more like it.'"

The band has been an on-again, off-again organization, but in the spring of '82 it reved up again, and this time, after 15 years, it looks like people are getting ready to take the band seriously. "They're still telling me that nothing will sell though," says Johnson tugging on his Bob James t-shirt. "I tell them that I've always had a solid base with the people, that I can fill concert halls and do good business in clubs, but nobody ever believed me until last summer when I got a gig in Sweet Basil. And even the club owner was expecting so much less than what happened. He kept making excuses for why the business was good. We did two Sundays and Mondays, and the first one was on July 4th and business was very good. So he said, 'The 4th of July is a holiday, and people don't have to go to work on Monday, so that's why it's busy, but Monday will be the real test.' Monday there were *more* people than there were Sunday night, and he said, 'Well, it's a holiday weekend; next week will be the real test.' There were *more* the next Sunday, and more than that on Monday. So the thing with the people, which has always been happening, is happening even more now.

"But record companies already have in their heads what they want to hear recorded, and it ain't tubas. So they have no reason to think that anybody will buy that. And, of course, they think that *they* know and the people don't know. I'm not going to be on my knees to any of those turkeys. It's frustrating. When you see the records that do come out—they're by the people who are just able to go in and say, 'Well, I play the tenor saxophone, and everybody likes the tenor saxophone,' so they give that guy a chance."

There's no question that Sweet Basil is hopping on the night that I drop in. During the set Johnson also has a chance to display his considerable ability on baritone saxophone. Although the baritone was his first horn, the tuba has attracted him ever since he was a lousy junior high school drummer in Massillon, Ohio. "I never was able to mount a decent roll," he recalls, "so I just kind of clanged around on the cymbals a lot and had a great time. I was always drawn to the tuba sound, though; I always was bass-oriented. With records I always knew what the bass was doing; I just had that."

One day, while prowling around the music room, young Howard came upon an unused baritone sax. His teacher was pleased—not so much because he needed a baritonist, but because it was a good way to get Howard out of the percussion section. What followed was a little bit of lessons, a little bit of at-home study, and a summer at band camp. At that point baritones weren't expected to do much more than *oom-pah*, but the young Johnson started hearing more than that. He noticed the *bah-dum, bah-dum, bah-dum* of the horn on Ray Anthony's corny hits ("It was his brother Leo playing baritone," explains Howard, "so he always got featured.") and started noticing Gerry Mulligan and Harry Carney wafting out over the radio. Yet, for some reason, he was more attracted to the tuba—during band practice he would eye the tubaists, memorizing the fingering.

"One of the days before practice, I picked one up, which was against the rules—you couldn't play somebody else's school-owned

instrument. I just wanted to see if I could play a chromatic scale. I did play it, but when I looked up the director was watching me. I was expecting hell. He said, 'How long have you been playing the tuba?' I said, 'No, honest, I've never played it before, and I'm never going to play it again.' And he said, 'You mean, just now was the first time you ever played it?' And I said, 'Yeah.' I was really scared. And he said, 'The reason I'm asking is that nobody who plays the tuba can get a tone on it for months. Why can you get a tone?' I didn't know; I said, 'I've got a tone?'

"Then there was some other stuff put in motion, because as the junior high school band director, he had the duty of feeding players into the high school band, which was a very hot band. The band was going to the Rose Bowl parade the next year, and they had about five seniors graduating playing the tuba and no sophomores—*none*—coming in who could play it and were not going to try out for the football team."

Johnson was quickly shuttled off to the high school where he played his chromatic scale for the band director and, voila, a year later he was marching the eight-mile length of the Rose Bowl parade with a sousaphone slung over his 125-pound frame. He was a contented young man and decided that music was to be his career.

But didn't anybody tell him he was crazy to even consider making a living playing the tuba? "Oh, everybody did. Massillon, Ohio is not a place of great vision, you know. When I first told people I wanted to play music, they would say, 'You can't make any money at the Elks Club.' That's because that's the only place they ever saw live musicians in the town. They thought I was thinking the same way they were as to what was available. And hardly any good bands came through the Elks Club. I'd say, 'No, no, I don't think I'm going to stick around here.' And they said, 'But musicians are a dime a dozen in Cleveland.' And I said, 'I'm not thinking of Cleveland.' And when I told them I wanted to go to New York, they sort of withdrew any idea that I was a smart kid—it's like I was stupid or a dreamer. So I didn't have any support, but I was just kind of hard-headed. If I ever waited for somebody else's approval, I probably wouldn't have done much of anything."

But upon graduation he didn't pack a tuba and baritone sax and head for New York. Instead he headed for Montgomery, Alabama and his uncle's construction firm, and from there into the navy, a four-year stint that he describes as "a mistake." He found out that the navy music school offered "considerably less than I had in my high school theory course." He also found out that they were determined to turn him into an alto saxophonist or clarinetist. Despite his protests—"Listen, I'm a tuba and baritone sax player."—he was auditioned on the smaller reeds and failed. By failing, he was ineligible to play the tuba or baritone, since the tuba and baritone were given to those who did *poorly* on the clarinet and alto test, but didn't fail. "It was kind of a stupidly set up thing."

After the navy it was off to Chicago, "just to get a job and work and try to find my way." That meant being hired as Christmas help in the warehouse of Montgomery Ward and hauling his baritone sax (he didn't even have a tuba in those days) to clubs and jam sessions, hoping to be invited to sit in. He sat in here and there—notably with an Ira Sullivan quartet—and began hanging around with Muhal Richard Abrams at Lincoln Gardens, where the first seeds of the AACM were being sown. He calls Muhal, even in those days of the early '60s, "inspiring."

The turning point in Howard's life came while talking with Eric Dolphy, who was in town at the time with John Coltrane. "I told him I was a tuba player, although I didn't have an instrument yet. And he got very excited about that and asked me what I was able to do on tuba, and I said, 'Oh, whatever I want to do, whatever I can do on the baritone saxophone.' So he said, 'You've got to take that to New York.' He said a lot of people were always looking for tuba players—Mingus, Gil Evans, Clark Terry. So I decided I would go right away and work on getting an instrument. I wasn't happy working in Chicago, and when I announced to musicians there that I was going to go to New York, they said, 'Well, you play okay, but do you think you're ready for New York?' And I told them, 'I'm working in a warehouse. I'll work in a warehouse in New York, and I'll be able to call Eric for a dime.'"

Johnson came to New York and didn't work in a warehouse—he worked in a book store and as a cook. At night he could be found in

**HOWARD
JOHNSON
SELECTED
DISCOGRAPHY**

with Gil Evans

BLUES IN ORBIT—Inner City IC 3041
SVENGALI—Atlantic 1643
PLAYS JIMI HENDRIX—RCA CPL 10667

with Charles Mingus

AND FRIENDS IN CONCERT—Columbia KG 31614

with Taj Mahal

THE REALTHING—Columbia GG 10619
HAPPY TO BE JUST LIKE I AM—Columbia C 30767

with Muhai Richard Abrams

BLUES FOREVER—Black Saint BSR 0061

with Frank Strozier

REMEMBER ME—Inner City 2066

with the Band

ROCK OF AGES—Capitol 11045

with Dexter Gordon

SOPHISTICATED GIANT—Columbia JC 34989

with Freddie Hubbard

HIGH BLUES PRESSURE—Atlantic SC 1501

with David "Fathead" Newman

STILL HARD TIMES—Muse 5283

Photo by Darryl Pitt



HOWARD JOHNSON'S EQUIPMENT

Howard Johnson plays a Mahillon (Belgium) Model 390, four-valve, double Bb tuba with a Sear Helleberg mouthpiece; a Mahillon Model

36, six-valve double F tuba with a Mirafone mouthpiece; and a Selmer Mark VII baritone saxophone with a Berg Larsen 135/1 mouthpiece and either Fibercane plastic or Bari nylon reeds.

various clubs—from cornball dixie rooms to Birdland, where he found himself with Charles Mingus on a bill that also featured the John Coltrane Quartet and a very young Flip Wilson. Throughout the '60s and '70s the tubaist was involved with dozens of recording projects—many old Blue Notes, a number of dates with Mingus, initially, and then pop dates, jingles, etc.—but he always encountered the prejudice that people have against his big horn.

"With Mingus," he says, "I had to beg for my one nightly solo, and I didn't often get it. After I got too much pride, I wouldn't beg anymore, so I never played. It was clear to me that he didn't care whether I played or not; as a matter of fact, he'd rather I didn't. This happened on a McCoy Tyner date, a Freddie Hubbard date, a Hank Mobley date, on a lot of dates. As late as 1977, I was doing the *Sophisticated Giant* date with Dexter Gordon, for which Slide Hampton wrote the arrangements, and I was going to play a solo on one of those tunes, and Dexter all of a sudden went, 'Wait a minute, Slide didn't play.' And Slide said, 'Listen, I'm conducting this thing, I'm trying to play the parts, and I have enough to do.' But Dexter said, 'Oh man, you've got to play, man, otherwise the tuba player'll play.'"

According to Howard, there are a few writers and arrangers in the jazz realm who treat the tuba well, but none, he points out, even comes close to the feeling for the instrument that Gil Evans possesses. The only sessions he recalls with fondness are the ones he's played with Evans, and Johnson credits him with advancing his tuba playing.

"There were things Gil requested of me that no one ever asked me to do before, and I didn't know how to do some of them. He used to use the phrase 'a light sound,' and I didn't know what he meant by that for years. One time in 1968 we were in the studio with Miles Davis' quintet and a large orchestra, and there was one part that was very difficult. It wasn't so difficult to play, but I'm not a great reader; I had to play the line with Ron Carter, and it was pretty high up. He was playing with his bow, and we had to be in tune, and the pressure was really on. I wasn't sure of myself, so I pulled back a lot, and when I heard it back, because I was so scared, it was really light sounding and just right.

And Gil said, 'Yeah, that's the sound I mean,' very calmly. And it really blew me away because I hadn't heard it myself before. I never duplicated it again on that date, but I learned how to play that way then." (That session, by the way, is as-yet unissued.)

To date, Johnson's steadiest gig was with the *Saturday Night Live* band, which he was with from the show's inception until the original cast departed and the program was restructured. Amazingly, that band, which included some of New York's hottest studio players, never got the opportunity to record because, although they made a demo, everybody said, "There's no singer."

So when pressed about his favorite recordings, Johnson is sheepish—he was spotlighted on a Frank Strozier date for Inner City and managed to be featured often with Gil Evans, but the definitive Howard Johnson is yet to be captured on wax. However, he acknowledges that the tuba is just beginning to find its niche in the jazz realm.

"I tell you," he says, "there seemed to be a little time there in the middle of the '50s—you know the term *zeitgeist*—when this thing was just out in the world. Some people picked up on it, some people didn't. Red Callender made the transition from the old tuba/bass player of the '40s to being a modern soloist in the '50s. Some people, like me and Ray Draper, were doing things in very separate circumstances. There's a wonderful classical tuba player in L.A. named Roger Bobo who was developing past what any of his teachers knew about in the middle of the '50s. John Fletcher, with the London Symphony, was also getting this together in the '50s. There was like a thing in the air—it all happened about the same time. It seems that the thing that touched us in the '50s has reached the people in the '80s."

It certainly reached the people who were packed into Sweet Basil that night—they paid their money to listen to six tuba players and not one of them expected to hear *The Music Goes 'Round And 'Round*. They were there for some swinging, solid, no-nonsense jazz played with surprising levity by Howard Johnson and Gravity.

"We'll just keep playing," says Johnson. "It's taken 15 years for people to get it. They will finally accept that somebody can play the instrument, and now it's the music itself that takes them somewhere." **db**

RECORD REVIEWS

★★★★★EXCELLENT

★★★★VERY GOOD

★★★GOOD

★★FAIR

★POOR

CHICO FREEMAN

TRADITION IN TRANSITION—Elektra

Musician 60163: JACKIE-ING; FREE ASSOCIATION; MYS-STORY; TALKIN' TRASH; EACH ONE TEACH ONE; AT A GLANCE; THE TRESPASSER; IN-SPIRIT; A PRAYER.

Personnel: Freeman, tenor saxophone (cuts 1-3, 5, 7, 9), flute (6, 8), bass clarinet (4); Wallace Roney, trumpet (1, 2, 4, 5, 7); Clyde Criner, piano (3, 5-9); Jack DeJohnette, piano (1), drums (2-4); Billy Hart, drums (1, 5-8).

★★★★★

If somebody asked me what was happening in jazz *right now*, I'd play him (or her) this album.

Chico Freeman's composing and arranging acknowledges the whole sweep of the jazz tradition, and his playing has the intelligence and vitality to hold it all together. At the age of 32, he clearly knows what he wants to do and where it fits in. As he puts it in the liner notes: "The transitional music of today will be the tradition of tomorrow."

To make his "transitional music," Freeman has twisted together the strands of his remarkable musical background—bebop and the blues, European classical music, modal and swing, and the AACM—into a unified style that encompasses them all. And he does it with real feeling. There is only one other recent album I can think of that really pulls off a synthesis like this: *Tin Can Alley*, by Jack DeJohnette's Special Edition.

Not coincidentally, Freeman played on that album, and DeJohnette plays on this one. They share a common vision of their heritage and its continuation. DeJohnette plays drums on three cuts and also offers a strong, heartfelt tribute to Monk as the pianist on *Jackie-ing*, where his crunching, jagged lines bounce and skitter off the powerhouse swing laid down by Cecil McBee and Billy Hart.

In his slightly cosmic liner notes, Freeman makes a case for the album being "one composition . . . a concept . . . a feeling." It has this kind of unity. It is not a single long piece or suite, but all of the varying moods and textures do interlock. The most turbulent pieces contain elements of relaxation; the most tranquil pieces retain an undercurrent of tension. The tune *Mys-story* is a perfect microcosm of this paradoxical musical architecture. Freeman juxtaposes sharply contrasting A and B sections (one a bluesy dirge, the other a lilting latin melody), and then simply *convince*s you that they belong together.

Cecil McBee, Freeman's longtime collaborator, is a major force throughout the album. He can swing deeply when he needs to, or lay down a potent ostinato; he can function as a third horn, or create a striking counterpoint line on the bottom. His sound is big and liquid, and his imagination never flags—the bass intro on *The Trespasser* is a little concerto in itself.



LARRY RICK
LARRY HEITZMAN

At its best, this music captures the feeling of some of the truly classic groups: the Miles Davis band of the mid-'50s, the John Coltrane Quartet, the Art Ensemble of Chicago. These are musicians who have pulled their influences together, crystallized them, and then taken it all a step further. There are rough edges and inconsistencies here, but they don't matter all that much. The talent and the mutual sympathy of the players shine through.

Most of all, this is a thoughtful piece of work. It has the combination of depth and accessibility that marks many important works. Chico Freeman is clearly one of the masters of his generation. —jim roberts

THELONIOUS MONK

LIVE AT THE IT CLUB—Columbia CS 38030:

BLUE MONK; WELL, YOU NEEDN'T, RHYTHM-A-NING; BLUES FIVE SPOT (FIVE SPOT BLUES); BEMSHA SWING; STRAIGHT, NO CHASER; NUTTY; EVIDENCE; MISTERIOSO; GALLOP'S GALLOP; BALU BOLIVAR BA-LUES-ARE.

Personnel: Monk, piano; Charlie Rouse, tenor saxophone; Larry Gales, bass; Ben Riley, drums.

★★★★★

Monk's tenure with Columbia records was, generally speaking, a period of refinement and focus. Most of the major pieces he wrote had already been introduced during his Blue Note, Prestige, and Riverside years. The Columbia recordings are often taken for granted as being less adventurous and more static in setting than the Riversides in particular. Yet these heretofore unreleased live tapes, from the middle of Monk's Columbia period, reveal the hard-swinging majesty of

his working band. One would be hard-pressed to find more spirited performances by Monk and an ensemble anywhere.

The It Club was a nondescript little jazz dive in Los Angeles, and when Monk brought his band in on Oct. 31, 1964, he was obviously in a *get down* mood. *Well, You Needn't* is played in such a hard stomping groove that one can imagine Monk executing his idiosyncratic shuffles and pirouettes to Charlie Rouse's celebratory solo. There's an almost gratuitous *'Round Midnight* that's kind of quick-and-dirty. It's as if Monk didn't want to get too introspective this night.

Throughout the album, Rouse is a joy to behold. He plays with more concentration, delight, and energy than ever. He takes on a rough-hewn tone and wades through the changes like a stevedore at a tea dance. The interplay between Monk's background figures on *Straight, No Chaser* and Rouse's solo suggest that the two are playing separate tunes. But Monk's well-placed notes often bear fruit in Rouse in the next measure.

Monk is in an especially playful mood on *Bemsha Swing*. He rolls the opening keyboard figure around on his palate a couple of times before he completes it and kicks off the tune. His solo is a series of eccentrically shaped fragments connected with near-nonexistent left-hand chords. When Rouse solos, Monk alternately precedes the tenor's thoughts and echoes them. Of course, everything that Monk plays sounds totally correct within its context.

The rhythm section of Gales and Riley is especially propulsive throughout. When Monk lays out behind Rouse, Gales is revealed as possibly the finest Monkian bassist of all. He's every bit the workhorse that Wilbur Ware was, but with more mobility. On the

obscure *Gallop's Gallop* (based on *Nice Work If You Can Get It*, I believe), Riley peppers his rock-steady beat with subtle accents like press-roll bits, and volleys Monk's own rhythmic epigrams back to him for reconsideration. Riley plays unison portions with Rouse on the out chorus that alternate with opposing chunks of melody. The It Club surely rocked on this night, and this recording recaptures the music fully.

—kirk silsbee

JOHN LINDBERG

COMIN' & GOIN'—Leo LR 104: *PLYWOOD*; *X.I.*; *AT HOME (THANKSGIVING SONG)*; *MELLOW T.*; *YESTERDAYS*.

Personnel: Lindberg, bass.

★ ★ ★ ★

TEAM WORK—Cecma 1004: *SOUNDPOST*; *MY FOOLISH HEART*; *TEAM WORK*; *DADA*; *DREAM*; *ELEMENTS*.

Personnel: Lindberg, bass; Hugh Ragin, trumpet, piccolo trumpet.

★ ★ ★ ½

DIMENSION 5—Black Saint BSR 0062: *ELEVEN THRICE*; *T'WIXT C AND D (PART 1 AND 2)*; *DIMENSION 5*.

Personnel: Lindberg, bass; Hugh Ragin, trumpet, piccolo trumpet; Marty Erlich, alto saxophone, flute; Billy Bang, violin; Thurman Barker, drums.

★ ★ ★

John Lindberg is a stunning young bassist. If he were thrice his 23 years, he still would be stunning; but he already has subsumed so much of the tradition and mastered so much of the technique of his instrument and the jazz genre that his boundaries seem to stretch ahead without limit. He can push outside all but the freest conventions; he can trill fluidly with a trumpet on a boppish head; he can make mournful and beautiful the venerable ballads, whether *Yesterdays* on *Comin' & Goin'* or *My Foolish Heart* on *Team Work*. There can be no question he is one of the best bassists in the music now; the question is whether these three discs present him at his best.

Comin' & Goin' is the most fully realized. It is, as a solo album, the record over which Lindberg exerts the most control, yet it is also, and for the same reason, the riskiest. Simply, solo bass albums are at a premium, quite possibly for the good reason that few bassists can compel a lay listener for 40 or 50 minutes. That much, Lindberg does. While jazz may be the synthesis of African, American, and, in Lindberg's case, some European classical influences, his playing reminds one of none of the common points of reference. He is enormously emotional, especially when bowing, and for the feel if not the musicology he reminds one of the music of the Jewish Diaspora, the lamentations, the sorrowful resonance. His sound is dark, moose, thickly wooded, but dappled in moments with trills and double-stops and lovely arabesques and Gypsy twists. And an album-closing elegy like *Yesterdays* rightly reaffirms something life-giving after the Goyaesque landscape he has rendered up to that point.

The duet LP *Team Work* begins to post the dilemma for Lindberg of how to share his gifts with an audience as well as a partner; the problem looms larger on *Dimension 5*, where he keeps even more company. Lindberg and Hugh Ragin, the trumpeter, clearly share a kinship, a telepathy. But, to this listener at least, theirs sometimes becomes a friendship so deep and private as to exclude eavesdropping. *Dada*, the freest of the duo selections, is the hardest to appreciate. And *Elements*, while a fine showcase for Ragin's total command of his instrument, is not the last work evoking the forces of nature. But

there is so much to recommend *Team Work*. The title selection finds Ragin constricting his tone until it approximates a voice, or a cry. Perhaps it is; the line Ragin controls is so fine. *Dream* is Lindberg's best vehicle. He sets the pastoral, almost ecclesiastical theme with his bowing and, with facility at the height of his range, virtually functions as a second trumpet.

A live date with a quintet, *Dimension 5* does not capture best what Lindberg can reach with a group. (His work with the Human Arts Ensemble and String Trio of New York better illuminate that side of the bassist.) The

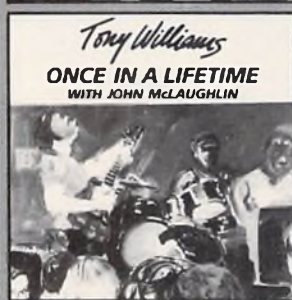


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best selection, the free-bop *T'wixt C And D* is split between both sides. And elsewhere, the accompanists do not always match Lindberg's mastery. Both Ragin and violinist Billy Bang adopt such puckering, astringent tones that the harmonic center is skewed toward their sourness. Saxophonist Marty Erlich and drummer Thurman Barker temper the mix a bit, but the impression that lingers is of the pained tone of their colleagues. But this criticism comes with two caveats: first, that *avant garde*, more than other jazz forms, is a personal one which no critic is immune from hearing poorly; and second, that the bulk of Lindberg's work on record and in performance suggests that any music bearing his name bears listening, even more in the future than the present. —sam freedman

RONALD SHANNON JACKSON

MAN DANCE—Antilles AN 1008: *MAN DANCE; IOLA; SPANKING; CATMAN; THE ART OF LEVITATION; BELLY BUTTON; GIRAFFE; WHEN SOULS SPEAK; ALICE IN THE CONGO.*

Personnel: Jackson, drums; Henry Scott, David Gordon, trumpet, flugelhorn; Zane Massey, soprano, alto, tenor saxophone; Vernon Reid, electric guitar, steel guitar, guitar synthesizer, banjo; Melvin Gibbs, Rev. Bruce Johnson, electric bass; Lee Rozie, tenor, soprano saxophone.

★ ★ ★ ★

The classifications of funk-jazz, punk-jazz, and no wave are only a part of the hyphe-nated maze trying to categorize the music of James Blood Ulmer, Defunkt, Cosmetic, Ornette Coleman's Prime Time, and Ronald Shannon Jackson. In many ways these electric jazz artists are just a continuation of fusion. The instruments are equally electric, the musicians equally virtuosic, but the beat is more dominant, the rhythms are tighter, and there's a penchant for Stax/Motown horn lines. After early fusion's pilgrimage through mysticism, European romanticism, and the infinities of space—with the Mahavishnu Orchestra, Chick Corea, and Herbie Hancock respectively—there is now a reinvestigation of urban black sensibilities. The music is back in the city, especially New York City, with occasional calls to Africa.

As Miles Davis inspired the first wave of fusion, so Ornette Coleman has triggered this new development. Not only have people such as Jackson and Ulmer studied the Harmolodic Theory with him, but because Coleman was the most prominent musician of the *avant garde* to electrify his band, he lent a heightened legitimacy to electric jazz and its resulting structural possibilities.

Structuralism is what former Coleman drummer Ronald Shannon Jackson's third album outing is all about. Jackson's compositions work like synergistics, where the impact of the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts. Jackson's drums center all but one of the pieces with a taut rhythmic conception that draws energy inward rather

than exploding outward. His percussive complexity distances him from funk, yet he maintains that kinetic motion. He builds opposing riffs around his drums, as on *Belly Button*, with the horns bouncing short fragments against each other, the twin-electric basses maintaining a jabbing counterpoint, and the guitarist running ostinato circles. Alone, these are disjointed sounds, but together they mesh into a propulsive force that would stop dead if even one element failed.

The importance of the soloist tends to diminish in the overall emphasis on ensemble structure, but at least two of the Decoding Society get unscrambled. Zane Massey evokes an Indian shenai player with his spiraling soprano run on the country & western-tinged *Giraffe*. Sharp rhythm changes frame him on either end in a bas-relief. Guitarist Vernon Reid is a speed demon throughout the album, but especially on *Spanking*, where he leads the charge into the freest section on the album, recalling the excitement of the Mahavishnu Orchestra for just a moment.

Each song on *Man Dance* contains several rhythmic sequences, but they're all taken at a sprinter's pace, with room for only the most fragmentary development of themes. Only the ballad *When Souls Speak* breaks the adrenaline rush; here the unison line of muted trumpet and soprano steps from the mist of *In A Silent Way*, and if *When Souls Speak* is not dedicated to Miles Davis, it should be. Perhaps tellingly, Jackson does not play on this track, which is a shame, because it gives the LP an emotional depth that's needed to elevate this music beyond passing interest. —john diliberto

GEORGE SHEARING/ MEL TORMÉ

AN EVENING WITH . . .—Concord Jazz CJ-190: *ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT RHYTHM; BORN TO BE BLUE; GIVE ME THE SIMPLE LIFE; GOOD MORNING HEARTACHE; MANHATTAN HOEDOWN; YOU'D BE SO NICE TO COME HOME TO; A NIGHTINGALE SANG IN BERKELEY SQUARE; LOVE; IT MIGHT AS WELL BE SPRING; LULLABY OF BIRDLAND.*

Personnel: Shearing, piano, vocal (cut 10); Tormé, vocals (1-3, 6-10); Brian Torff, bass.

★ ★ ★ ★

A congenial formality underlies the performances of George Shearing and Mel Tormé, a formality born of thorough mastery of the craft of music. The setting for this recording was a formal occasion, a benefit concert that followed a lavish dinner at the Hotel Mark Hopkins in San Francisco, but it was no impediment to swinging. Not wild swinging, just tidy swinging.

Tormé is a smooth one, part saxophone (as cited by critic Philip Elwood) and part mellow cornet (especially on the quasi-dixieland endings he employs on a couple of cuts). His long tones in *It Might As Well Be Spring* and *A Nightingale Sang In Berkeley Square* are

savored kisses. Sophistication marks his dramatic nuances (never overblown) on these ballads just as suppleness infuses his singing and scatting on *All God's Chillun, Love*, and the other rhythm pieces. Tormé the writer is represented by *Born To Be Blue*, his ballad from 1947, which is as ageless as Shearing's lush harmonies.

The pianist's anticipatory accompaniment and orderly improvisations are tailored for Tormé, every line asserting the beat, each note a pearl. Bassist Torff's *Manhattan Hoedown*, a piano/bass duet, inspires a strutting, hard-charging Shearing solo, and *Good Morning Heartache*, another duet, evokes shimmering serenity (more morning than heartache). Torff's bass on the latter reverberates with distant high harmonics and vast, whale-like groanings. On *Hoedown* he gets up into mandolin territory, racing around the strings on multiple fingers. Torff pushes the beat, and on the opener, *All God's Chillun*, he seems to get ahead of himself in rapid-fire excitement.

The concert ends with the composer of *Lullaby Of Birdland* singing a rubato chorus before Tormé voices swinging approval: a fitting finale to an eloquent program.

—owen cordle

CHICK COREA

TOUCHSTONE—Warner Bros. 23699-1: *TOUCHSTONE (PROCESSION, CEREMONY, DEPARTURE); THE YELLOW NIMBUS; DUENDE; COMPADRES; ESTANCIA; DANCE OF CHANCE.*
Personnel: Corea, piano, Yamaha GS-1, Fairlight CMI, OB-Xa, Mini-Moog, Rhodes electric piano, Moog 55, gong, cymbal; Paco De Lucia, acoustic guitar (cuts 1,2), handclaps (2); Al DiMeola, electric guitar (4); Allen Vizzutti, trumpet (6); Lee Konitz, alto saxophone (3); Steve Kujala, tenor saxophone, flute (6); Gayle Moran, voices (1); Carol Shine, violin (3); Greg Gottlieb, cello (3); Bob Magnusson, bass (3); Carlos Benavent (1,6), Stanley Clarke (4), bass guitar; Lenny White (4), Alex Acuna (5,6), drums; Laudir DeOliviera (1,5), Don Alias (2,5,6), percussion.

★ ★ ½

At first glance *Touchstone* appears to be a study in pomposity. Here is a concept album with a three-part programmatic suite for its first cut and liner notes that rework the legend of El Dorado. This version stars Rivera (an advance man for the gold-hungry Conquistadors), the Singing Woman, the city of gold, and the town's supreme judge, the touchstone.

Put the record on the turntable and the pomposity continues. In writing the *Touchstone* suite, Chick Corea turned repeatedly to his two favorite compositional devices: the Spanish phrasing and harmonies which make everything he writes here lately sound like *Son Of Spain*, and those acrobatic feats of unison playing that were starting to sound stale long before *Return To Forever* broke up. It calls to mind something the Singing Woman says. When Rivera asks

her what the touchstone does for a living, she tells him it functions as "a test of worth. A measure of falsity."

Chick Corea should hope that that touchstone only exists in the story. If it ever materialized, this album would be in trouble. For if he held *Touchstone* (the record) up to touchstone (the rock), every tune but one would flunk the test and set off the falsity alarms. Only *Duende* escapes the smothering effects of Corea's Spanishisms and unison tours de force. For here Corea stopped relying on his past and wrote something fresh and extraordinary. *Duende* is a masterly tone poem on the order of something by Ravel or Debussy. Everything about the work is exquisite, from the restrained melody and the voicing—piano and alto saxophone with a violin, cello, bass trio—to the wistfully introspective playing of saxophonist Lee Konitz.

Touchstone's remaining pieces have their moments. Paco De Lucia makes his acoustic guitar as riveting as its electric counterpart on his ad-lib during the *Ceremony* movement of the *Touchstone* suite. For their *Compadres* solos, Stanley Clarke and Al DiMeola use shrill tones and rapid rhythmic and thematic changes to commemorate this Return To Forever reunion. Notice, these moments are of an improvisational nature only. That's because the compositions themselves operate within such a limited scope. Corea's dependence on themes of Spanish descent and unison passages is responsible for this. These items were once fresh compositional constructs for Corea. Through his overuse, however, yesterday's inventions have become today's cliches. —cliff radel

SONNY STITT

NEW YORK JAZZ—Verve UMV 2558:

NORMAN'S BLUES; I KNOW THAT YOU KNOW; IF I HAD YOU; ALONE TOGETHER; TWELFTH STREET RAG; DOWN HOME BLUES; SONNY'S TUNE; STARS FELL ON ALABAMA; BODY AND SOUL; BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA.

Personnel: Stitt, alto, tenor saxophone; Jimmy Jones, piano; Ray Brown, bass; Jo Jones, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

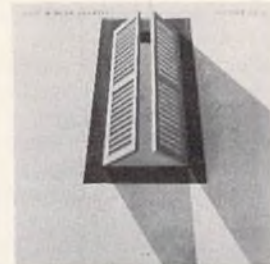
SONNY, SWEETS & JAWS—Who's Who WWLP 21022: *OH, LADY BE GOOD; WHAT'S NEW; THERE IS NO GREATER LOVE; THE CHEF; I CAN'T GET STARTED WITH YOU; LESTER LEAPS IN.*

Personnel: Stitt, alto, tenor saxophone; Harry "Sweets" Edison, trumpet; Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, tenor saxophone; Eddie Higgins, piano; Donn Most, bass; Duffy Jackson, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

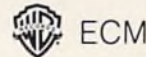
Whether in the fierce heat of bloody competition or in the less pressured setting of a single-horn date, Sonny Stitt always remained true to his own exceptionally high standards of performance. Consistency was his hallmark, so one could always count on him to reach and maintain a peak level of intensity—even when his collaborators left something to be desired. Fortunately for rec-

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ord collectors, though, the latter occasions were few and certainly do not include the two sessions herein discussed.

The earlier, *New York Jazz*, is a handsome repressing of an album first released in 1957, and, as is true of all of Polygram's current Japanese reissues, it retains the same album cover and liner notes as the original. Indeed, the only areas of difference between the two releases lie in the newly assigned catalog numbers, the publication credits, the vastly improved sound and surfaces, and the self-resealing protective outer sleeves.

Like most first-generation boppers, Stitt was just as comfortable in the company of swingmen as he was with the newer, more forward-seeking firebrands of the late '50s. Here he is matched with a rhythm section that, by the then-current standards of hard-bop, might seem a trifle conservative. But no matter, Stitt knew how to function in virtually any ambience. Admittedly, Jimmy Jones' skills have always been better suited to vocal accompaniments and arranging than to straightahead blowing, but with the assured, gap-bridging foundation that Brown and Papa Jo provide, it all comes together quite comfortably.

Over the course of the album, Stitt divides his time fairly equally between his two horns, his large, round sound and centered intonation being commonly shared and readily identifiable virtues seldom noticed in the work of other doublers. Similarly rare is Stitt's dual approach to ideational patterns. Where the majority of sax doublers seem content to rely on closely related thought and finger patterns regardless of the particular horn in their hands at any given moment, Stitt had early developed a stylistic division between the two of his choosing. On tenor, his roots in Lester Young are quickly apparent, and not only in his characteristically smooth-edged sound, but in the lean, sober agility of his lines as well. Conversely, his alto playing, while still retaining as a carry-over an almost tenor-like hugeness of tone, is that much more closely akin to the profusions of Parkerian bop. Sadly, this latter point of similarity has been done to death over the years. Let it suffice that, while Parker was unquestionably the innovative paragon of his age and a model for almost all who heard him, Stitt, only four years his junior, had already been moving in parallel directions by the time he was 20. Parker's role, then, was to help the younger man synthesize and focus his talents, and not to exert the tyrannical control so often suggested by misguided critics.

On *New York Jazz* Stitt is at the helm throughout, sailing and steaming his way over the familiar waters of blues, ballads, and stompers, while his rhythm section properly occupies itself with the yeomanlike duties of keeping the ship afloat. As a perfectly produced example of Stitt at his inspired best, this album cannot be overly recommended.

Recorded live almost a quarter-century later at Bubba's, a Fort Lauderdale, Florida, jazz restaurant, *Sonny, Sweets & Jaws* offers

a largely undiminished Stitt, a remarkably intact Edison, a furiously bubbling Davis, and an incendiary straightahead house rhythm section. In fact, everyone is in such stirring form that any emphasis I may apply to Stitt's continued persuasiveness in these latter-day environs would be disproportionately unjust to the others. Quite simply, they are all grand. Following a head based jointly on Hawkins' *Riftide* and Monk's *Hackensack*, *Lady Be Good* opens with a strong Edison solo and proceeds through equally muscular statements by the two tenormen. The well-balanced rhythm section is on top all of the way, with the woody sounds of Mast's acoustic bass in especially resounding prominence. What a joy it is to hear a real bass again after all these years of electronically enhanced rubber bands!

What's New is Stitt's alto feature and, though seemingly gratuitous, his frequent triple-timing nevertheless integrates quite well into the overall structure of his solo. Ostensibly an Edison showcase, *There Is No Greater Love* is just as valuable for the light it throws on bassist Mast. After a solo walking intro, he is joined for a duo chorus by the softly muted trumpeter; a communally voiced crescendo then leads Edison into a brilliant display of heated swing improvisation, after which a slightly Garnerized Higgins (yes, the same one from Chicago's London House in the '60s) has a brief say before the initial duo returns for an incredibly sustained diminuendo-type ending.

The Chef is a way-up blues notable for the relentless drive with which Mast and Jackson (bassist Chubby Jackson's son) propel the hornmen, who, to a man, respond with shared vigor and obvious delight. Davis then center-stages for a lush essay on *I Can't Get Started* before the set-closing *Lester Leaps In*, upon which the heretofore neglected pianist finally gets a chance to insert some good two-fisted romping stride.

All in all, an exciting and illuminating album well worth the trouble one might have in finding it.

—jack sohmer

GARY PEACOCK

VOICE FROM THE PAST—PARADIGM—

ECM-1-1210: *VOICE FROM THE PAST; LEGENDS; MOOR; ALLEGORY; PARADIGM; ODE FOR TOMTEN.*

Personnel: Peacock, bass; Jan Garbarek, tenor, soprano saxophone; Tomasz Stanko, trumpet; Jack DeJohnette, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

If you've found Gary Peacock's three previous ECM albums too cool, his substitution of a horn section for piano on this dark but colorful quartet effort will probably warm you up. The mood is still Peacock's psychological hour—meditative, spare, hyper-aware, brooding, melancholy even—but spiced with spiffy Ornette-ish swing (*Moor*), a dot-to-dot framework that accelerates to some extraordinary, sympathetic improvising (*Paradigm*), and a tumbling, good-natured tune

(*Ode For Tomten*). Three tracks feature winsome, fetching melodies. *Voice* (recorded originally by Peacock in 1971) attractively hitches up its rhythmic pants mid-tune; *Allegory's* surprise triads-to-dissonance really works; and *Moor* is downright singable. Add Jan Garbarek's heady invocations of Albert Ayler (warbling fermatas, simple ascending triads, wailing ascents), elastic, slurring muscle between odd registers of his juicy-toned soprano and burly tenor, and his consistently delicious, sinewy lines and you have Gary Peacock's most winning album since the Keith Jarrett collaboration, *Tales Of Another*.

The horn section's ragged, blabby rubatos are uncannily (and not unhappily) reminiscent of the Art Ensemble of Chicago. No surprise, then, that Polish trumpet player Tomasz Stanko's freewheeling and bold textures resemble Lester Bowie's. Oddly, however, Stanko, noted as a free player, solos best on the straight, walking tempos; the open vehicles reveal him repeating the same ideas, particularly one arching, triplet outburst.

Peacock's bass, strong but not ostentatiously showcased, is an unself-conscious lead instrument with an immaculate, taut, cello-like spring. His intelligent phrases bring in with awesome dexterity bits and pieces, and reworkings, of the melody. As an accompanist, of course, he helped originate the modern bass style in the 1960s, shifting fluidly from discourse to discussion, harmonic underpinning to textural interplay, support to counterpoint. Jack DeJohnette's similarly shifty, scrupulously appropriate drumming, however, like the difference between a tastefully decorated Bauhaus apartment and a lived-in house, borders on fussiness.

But no matter. This record isn't vaporous, pseudo-enigmatic, or even impressionistic. Its spaciness is its strength. Says Peacock, "Content is the sound; context is the space out of which it comes. The only real thing is context." This sense of the music surrounded by something larger than itself can sound stagey and cold; here it is passionate, luminous

—paul de Barros

ARTHUR BLYTHE

ELABORATIONS—Columbia FC 38163:

ELABORATIONS; METAMORPHOSIS; SISTER DAISY; ONE MINT JULEP; SHADOWS; THE LOWER NILE.

Personnel: Blythe, alto saxophone; Kelvyn Bell, guitar; Bob Stewart, tuba; Abdul Wadud, cello; Mohammed Abdullah, congas; Wilbur Morris, bass; Bobby Battle, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

Elaborations furthers the process of consolidation that Arthur Blythe began with his last album, *Illusions*. Blythe forged his reputation as an avant gardist, but the lessons of his loft days have been taken to form an uncompromising middle road. His music refers to the experimentalism of the recent decade as well as the past traditions of jazz without subscribing to either camp. Blythe has also jetti-

ANOTHER RHODES SCHOLAR SPEAKS OUT.

soned the more overt funk of his major label debut, *Lenox Avenue Breakdown*, but that influence can still be felt in drummer Battle's sharply etched rhythms and Blythe's urbane, nursery rhyme melodies. Like his music, Blythe's ensemble has coalesced into a tightly honed unit that rarely offers a self-indulgent solo or gratuitous embellishment. Only guitarist Bell strays with his West Coast stylings, occasionally filling holes that don't exist.

The distance between Blythe's mid-'70s work and his current output can be found by comparing any of the three works on *Elaborations* that were initially heard on Blythe's earlier albums. On the version of *Metamorphosis* from the 1979 India Navigation album of the same name, the ensemble dispenses with the head in a carefree fashion to run off in unfettered excursions. Blythe himself reveals a tortured, burning tone that arcs painfully through the swaying rhythms. However, living up to its title, *Metamorphosis* is barely recognizable in its new streamlined form. After a solemn opening the group launches a unison head that is jaunty rather than rag-tag. Battle centers the ensemble around his crisp, yet supple demarcations while they punch out the theme with an exuberance that supplants the earlier recklessness. Blythe's soloing here and throughout *Elaborations* is cogent and succinct with an inner coolness that maintains composure even while his alto is bursting at the seams. If it lacks the explosive intensity and unbridled passion of his earlier rendition, it also hits the mark closer to center while sparing the rest of the terrain from the debris.

Elaborations continues Blythe's parry-and-thrust relationship with Abdul Wadud's earthy cello. Their lightning interplay contrasts against the fat bottom laid down by tubaist Bob Stewart. Despite its weighty sound, the tuba brings a levity to Blythe's music that pervades everything from the boppish *Sister Daisy* to his updated neo-classical dirge, *Shadows*. There's a joyfulness in Arthur Blythe's recent records that is infectious.

—john diliberto

MILT JACKSON/ OSCAR PETERSON

AIN'T BUT A FEW OF US LEFT—Pablo
2310-873: *AIN'T BUT A FEW OF US LEFT*; *A TIME FOR LOVE*; *IF I SHOULD LOSE YOU*; *STUFFY*; *BODY AND SOUL*; *WHAT AM I HERE FOR*.
Personnel: Jackson, vibraphone; Peterson, piano; Roy Brown, bass; Grady Tate, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

The disheartening title atop this LP reminds us that the once young tigers of the bebop movement are now pushing 60. Or to put it another way, Messrs. Jackson, Peterson, and Brown probably represent to the young contemporary player of the '80s what Bunk Johnson and Kid Ory represented to the beboppers when they were the young contemporary players of the late '40s.

I wouldn't press the comparison any fur-



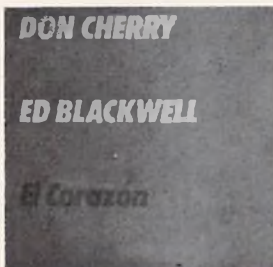
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RECORD REVIEWS

ther, however, because there is no sense of looking back present in the music heard here. The title track is a long medium blues which closes with a couple of wry choruses of me-and-my-shadow byplay between Bags and Oscar. *Stuffy* is full of sparkle and bopisms; note Peterson's emphatic comping behind Brown which leads into an unexpected modulation and the final chorus. *For Love* is a pretty ballad that serves as duet grist for piano and vibes, though it's inclined to drift a bit.

On side two *Lose You* is explored from many points of view: a slow duet, a slow quartet, in mid-tempo 4/4. *Body And Soul* is another double-tempo routine—that is really not a routine at all since it shifts gears at unexpected points. I'm not sure but that Ray Brown isn't really the star performer on most of side two. His bass is richly etched throughout, and he contributes an absolutely intoxicating introductory vamp on *What Am I Here For* that rings in your ears while everyone else is soloing. I was hooked from the first pluck. And happily the performance pays off nicely with some delightfully crisp exchanges before Brown returns with that hypnotic vamp again, this time with some percussive insertions from Grady Tate, who plays with swinging precision throughout.

Pablo has put out a great many of these mix-and-match LPs over the years, usually with Peterson at the center of things. If our general familiarity with the idiom and artists is inclined to produce a sort of critical ennui at times, it's only because so little needs to be said about a music that speaks so clearly and so consistently for itself. This is a very good album, and it makes no sense to complain that Pablo has released too many very good albums. —*John McDonough*

CHET BAKER

PEACE—Enja 4016: *SYZYGIES; PEACE; LAMENT FOR THELONIOUS; THE SONG IS YOU; SHADOWS; FOR NOW.*

Personnel: Baker, trumpet; David Friedman, marimba, vibraphone; Buster Williams, bass; Joe Chambers, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

IN CONCERT—India Navigation IN 1052: *AIREGIN; AU PRIVAVE; BODY AND SOUL; WILLOW WEEP FOR ME; WALKIN'.*

Personnel: Baker, trumpet; Lee Konitz, alto saxophone; Michael Moore, bass; Beaver Harris, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★ 1/2

Here is an aural irony, a relaxed and succulent Chet Baker when teamed with a trio of modernists, and a tentative and rigid Baker when paired with a fellow veteran of post-bop jazz.

The setting was unusual for *In Concert*—two patriarchs of the Cool School playing in the hot confines of the Creative Music Studio in New York. The different paths of Lee Konitz and Chet Baker are distinctly marked on *In Concert*; while Baker has still had to contend with the longtime label of aloofness branded

on the cool stylists, Konitz has quietly dispelled it time and time again. In fact, Konitz has acquitted himself so well in a variety of settings, in his own groups and with a surprising range of other leaders, that by now it shouldn't be surprising to hear him sound so hot and modern here. The disappointment is to find Baker so ensconced in a style that often sounds ill at ease with Konitz.

Baker has a talent for playing off of other melodists, but there is little sense of communication or harmony between the two frontliners. What the album offers is a powerful Konitz performance. He weaves an almost Dolphyesque path through *Body And Soul*, with Michael Moore taking cues on bowed bass. Konitz deftly handles the difficult rhythmic breaks on Sonny Rollins' *Airegin*, rolls a fascinating off-key chorus on *Willow Weep For Me* then returns for another trip through his lower register, and swings through *Walkin'*. The trumpeter finally breaks through with an uncharacteristically bold improvisation on *Walkin'*, leaving the listener to wonder what happens after the recording abruptly fades at the beginning of a bass solo.

Baker's fans may find it intriguing to hear him in this boppish context, but they will likely be more pleased with *Peace*, which finds Baker closer to his element. Though the trumpeter is the leader, the album is strongly influenced by David Friedman, who wrote four of the compositions and shares primary instrumental duties, recalling Baker's successful collaboration with vibist Wolfgang Lackerschmid. Friedman, Williams, and Chambers create graceful and shadowy colors—undoubtedly a rhythm section more to Baker's liking. Here are elements of classic Baker, the milky tone and spare touch on quite comely ballads, *Peace* and *Shadows*, and a light exercise through *The Song Is You*. The feel slips from the pretty to the shady, though never sinister.

The rhythm section on *Peace* is certainly no more traditional than that on *In Concert*, but tries to be more sympathetic to the leader. The vibes are well suited as a foil to such a soft touch on trumpet, but the particular resonance of its wooden sister, the marimba, creates the unique moments on the album.

Chet Baker's staunch resolution to retain his minimalist style will always have its detractors and limit the milieu in which he will sound comfortable. That's what happens here, on one noble experiment and one more notable success. —*r. bruce dold*

ERIC KLOSS

SHARING—Omnisound N-1044: *SONG FOR MR. "T"; SHARING; WRAPPED IN A CLOUD; SOUNDTRACKS; IRISH FANTASY (THE BALLAD OF CHARLOTTE MAGEE); INNER SADNESS/INNER STRENGTH.*

Personnel: Kloss, alto saxophone; Gil Goldstein, piano, electric piano, organ, synthesizer.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Eric Kloss is no ingenue, yet he speaks like a

child. He has a ball, yet he thinks deep. The 33-year-old alto saxophonist from Pittsburgh is a 20-year veteran of the boards and bars; still every note from his horn sings as fresh as a daisy; his tone is as pert as schoolboys in shorts; each line is crisply ruled as a new theorem; his touch is as warm as a basket of puppies. Here we have an unusually formal and romantic side of Kloss, in spacious, windswept pairings with his recent associate Gil Goldstein, who shares with Kloss band-time with urban blues master Pat Martino and a penchant for what New Zealand composer/pianist Mike Nock calls "free lyricism." Kloss' sense of the blues runs deep and true (he worked organ trios on his now-shelved tenor as a kid), and it informs even these classically balanced performances. Recent manifestations of blues have filtered through his decade's experiences with Transcendental Meditation and Indian philosophy: you can hear it in the horn smears on *Mr. "T"* and modal lines on *Inner Sadness*.

"Playing is like cooking," stated Kloss, "it's a constant matter of readjustment of temperature, spice, timing." This album contains more cream than curry, and the two players fold together more like eggs and milk than meat and potatoes. The layering effect in Kloss' compositions let him build up intensity and meaning chorus after chorus; the lines of *Mr. "T"* and *Inner Strength*, doubled in thirds and/or sonorously repeated, remain clear-cut yet flow forth and back on themselves. The James Taylor tribute further shows Kloss' wonderingly curious attitude toward music and life; more accepting than eclectic, he appreciates deeply music he doesn't play himself, e.g. his high regard for the Police.

Sharing, a ballad that cries out for Kloss' lyrics (printed on the back cover), has an exquisite melody and beautifully fitting story. That track alone is worth the album. Kloss' *On Wings Of Song* was recently recorded by Roy Kral and Jackie Cain, and that's a beauty, too. He may be hitting his stride as a songwriter; he already has achieved in recent years what Aaron Copland (speaking for classical composers) lovingly calls "the long line." Chart the ineffable flow, for example, of the album's long two closers, one dedicated to Kloss' tale-improvising fourth-grade teacher (with a Gaelic lilt and quasi-legit solos) and the other an organic rebirth and growth through suffering.

The gentle, pastoral mood of this album should not mislead you into thinking it's just soft-core fluff. Listen hard, and Kloss will take you along on some real inner experiences. Goldstein understands, and his unerring rhapsodizing plays perfect complement to the bracing alto. His limpid lines mark seamless undercurrents throughout *Inner Strength* (a most moving Indo-jazz fusion piece) and his own more-than-pretty *Cloud*, and sustain the high level of creative exposition. Many of Kloss' compositions spring directly from his sublimating and translating into music his life experiences: he actually makes you feel and define specific emotions through his music; this, to me, is as pure and perfect an expres-

sion of the composer's art to a listener as Whitney Balliett's breathtaking ability as a critic to make you see and hear a musician through words is to a reader.

—fred bouchard

THE KLEZMORIM

METROPOLIS—Flying Fish FF 258:

CONSTANTINOPLE; BUCHAREST; THE TUBA DOINA; HOT DISHES; KRAMTWEISS STEPS OUT; THE GOOD SOLDIER; HEYSER BULGAR; THE PEOPLE'S DANCE; MOLDVANKE; SHRYER'S DOINA; A WILD NIGHT IN ODESSA; THE SHEPHERD'S DREAM.

Personnel: David Julian Gray, clarinets, piano; Lev Liberman, alto, soprano saxophone; Kevin Linscott, trombone; John Raskin, percussion, xylophone; Donald Thornton, tuba; Brian Wishnefsky, trumpet.

★ ★ ★ ½

KLEZMER CONSERVATORY BAND

YIDDISHE RENAISSANCE—Kleztone 39172:

LEBEDIK UN FREYLEKH; PAPIROSN/FREYLEKHE YIDELEKH; RUMENISHE FANTAZIE; BEYM REBN IN PALESTINE; DER NAYER SHER; YIDDISH BLUES; A RUMENISHER DOYNE; ROZHINKES MIT MANDLEN; DER HAYSER BULGAR; VILNA; RUMENYE, RUMENYE.

Personnel: Don Byron, clarinet; Judy Bressler, vocals; Hankus Netsky, piano, alto saxophone; Miriam Rabson, Greta Buck, Marvin Weinberger, violin; Abby Rabinovitz, piccolo, flute; Ingrid Monson, cornet; Frank London, cornet, mellophone; Merryl Goldberg, baritone saxophone; David Harris, trombones; Barry Shapiro, piano, accordion; James "Sim" Guttmann, boss; Charlie Berg, drums.

★ ★ ★ ½

KAPELYE

FUTURE & PAST—Flying Fish FF 249: *ODESSA BULGAR; YOSHIKE FURT AVEK; A YUR NUKH*

MAYN KHASENE; BESSARABER KHOSIDL; GUT PURIM, YIDN; KHOSN, KALE; ABE SCHWARTZ'S FAMOUS SHER; IN SHTETL NIKOLAEV; VI AZOY TRINKT A KEYSOR TEY; FUN TASHLIK; MOTL DER OPERATOR; DI MAME IZ GEGANGEN IN MARK ARAYN.

Personnel: Henry Sapoznik, fiddle, vocals; Ken Maltz, clarinet, percussion; Eric Berman, tuba; Lauren Brody, accordion, piano; Josh Waletzky, piano, percussion, vocals; Michael Alpert, fiddle, percussion, vocals.

★ ★ ★ ½

Jewish musicians and composers have played a prominent role in American music, from classical to pop, jazz, rock, folk, and even blues idioms, but only in the past few years have serious attempts been made to revive the Yiddish-inflected styles that were brought to this country by Eastern European immigrants in the early part of this century. With the emergence of new groups like The Klezmerim, the Klezmer Conservatory Band, and Kapelye, among others, this forgotten legacy of "eastern swing" has been resurrected.

The tradition of *klezmer*, or instrumental,

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"The band's greatest strength is its ability to play everything from rhythm and blues and contemporary funk to new wave and progressive jazz. But because the band is such a stickler for detail and eclectic originality, many of today's fusionists may not be able to appreciate its intelligent complexities." (*Aquarian*) Martin Fogel (saxophones), Michael Suchorsky (drums), David Torn (guitar) and Bruce Yaw (bass).

Eberhard Weber*



Later That Evening ECM 1-1231

✪ *Later That Evening*, the newest recording from the brilliant German bassist Eberhard Weber, brings together keyboard player Lyle Mays (from the Pat Metheny Group), reed player Paul McCandless (Oregon), drummer Mike DiPasqua (Gallery) and guitarist Bill Frisell (Jan Garbarek and Paul Motian groups).

Mike Nock*



Ondas ECM 1-1220

✪ "Mike Nock has a remarkable sensitivity for intense compositions, outstanding for their clear thoughtfulness." (*Audio*, Germany) Joining pianist Mike Nock on *Ondas*, his ECM debut recording, are drummer Jon Christensen and bassist Eddie Gomez.



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music dates back at least to the Middle Ages, when Jewish players performed not only at Jewish weddings and festivals, but for gentile audiences as well, frequently in company with gentile musicians. Periodically restricted by both Jewish and gentile authorities, these itinerant *klezmerim* eked out a precarious livelihood along the highways and byways of Europe, assimilating various ethnic influences within the pale of Jewish settlement that ran from the Baltic Sea to the Balkan Mountains.

By the time their music was first set, literally, in wax, the *klezmerim* had accumulated a repertoire of Polish, Ukrainian, Rumanian, Bulgarian, Tartaric, Greek, and other folk forms, emphasizing those tunes that shared a common modality with traditional synagogue chants. However, the most ancient and venerable Hebrew modes, such as those for the cantillation of the Pentateuch and Prophets, are found rarely, if at all, in *klezmer* music; those synagogue modes which are commonly used are themselves of later Eurasian derivation.

Klezmer instrumentation also reflected prevailing European tastes. Some of the oldest disc and cylinder recordings are of flute and fiddle groups, the staples of occidental dance music in the 18th and early 19th centuries (the modern Cuban *charanga* is of similar extraction). The violin and clarinet—the latter replacing the flute—continued to be featured, especially for solo work, but the worldwide marching band craze of the late 19th century brought about a gradual shift to brass instruments. Thus it is no coincidence that the *klezmer* orchestras were constituted along the same lines as the similarly derived ragtime and traditional jazz ensembles; even the banjo had its counterpart in the *tsimbalom*, or hammered dulcimer.

Given the Jews' predilection for absorption, it is hardly surprising that the American immigrant *klezmerim* were quick to adopt jazz and ragtime effects into their own music. Soon there were Jewish minstrel bands who played vaudevillized rags in blackface, just as there had been appropriately costumed Jewish "Gypsy" bands in Europe. The influence was reciprocated, as native ragtime orchestras incorporated Eastern modes into faddish "Sheik of Araby" compositions. In New York, the pit bands of the flourishing Yiddish theaters spawned a new, "hot" style of improvisation within the traditional genre. But as English-speaking generations came of age, *klezmer* music and Yiddish folk song gave way to more cosmopolitan sounds. Violinists typically gravitated toward classical music, singers and songwriters to the Broadway stage, reed and brass players to jazz. Jazz trumpeters like Red Rodney and Ziggy Elman began their careers as *klezmerim*; Elman's adaptation of *Bei Mir Bist Du Shayn* joined Benny Goodman's other Yiddish-swing hit *And The Angels Sing*.

In later years *klezmer* music fell into dormancy, preserved only on dusty 78 rpm records and yellowed scores, and in the memories of the aging garment workers and

tradesmen who still moonlight as wedding musicians in the Jewish Orthodox community. Then in 1977 Arhoolie Records released the first album by The Klezmerim, a mixed group of youthful revivalists from Berkeley, California, whose Jewish founders had apparently rediscovered their roots via the bluegrass-and-Balkan school of folk music that thrives in that university town. The Klezmerim rekindled nationwide interest in the traditional genre, primarily, but not exclusively among young assimilated Jews, and prompted the formation of several new bands, including Boston's Klezmer Conservatory Band and New York's Kapelye. In 1981 Folkways Records issued *Klezmer Music 1910-1942*, a compilation of scratchy but priceless old recordings by such Yiddish-American pioneers as Abe Schwartz and I. J. Hochman, providing a standard of authenticity against which modern reconstructions can be measured.

After two LPs for Arhoolie and a number of personnel changes, The Klezmerim have abandoned their previous vocal essays and eclectic format for a strictly instrumental brass and reed approach on their new Flying Fish album, *Metropolis*. Leaders Lev Liberman and David Julian Gray, on saxophone and clarinet respectively, spin the winding, Oriental-sounding melody lines with sprightly panache, but much of the band's punch springs from its fine brass section, with tubaist Donald Thornton supplying the lumbering, Russian-bearish rhythms. The Klezmerim's current repertoire of Rumanian *doinas*, Moldavian *horas*, and Bessarabian *bulgars* is a representative sampling of lively Jewish dance forms, but their performances here suffer from a certain air of sameness, with the familiar strains of *Havah Negilah* surfacing repeatedly.

The Klezmer Conservatory Band is the creation of Hankus Netsky, an instructor in the Third Stream Jazz department of the New England Conservatory of Music and the descendant of several professional *klezmerim*. Like The Klezmerim, the Conservatory Band comprises both Jewish and gentile members, including such outstanding soloists as violinist Greta Buck and clarinetist Don Byron. Byron, a young Afro-American, plays the characteristic "laughing" runs with superb technique and amazingly authentic feeling, even if he is not quite a match for traditional virtuosi like Dave Tarras (the Benny Goodman of *klezmer* music) and Naftali Brandwein. The 14-piece ensemble achieves the brilliant sound of a concert band rather than a dance group, providing the most rollicking instrumental arrangements of any of the revivalist units. Their vocal selections, drawn from Yiddish theater and folksong, are less effective; although singer Judy Bressler is related to a number of Yiddish theater stars, her Americanized delivery lacks the quavering pathos that these highly sentimental numbers require.

Kapelye was founded by Brooklynite Henry Sapoznik, a cantor's son turned bluegrass fiddler and then Jewish archivist. It was

Sapoznik who put together the Folkways anthology, but with his own all-Jewish band he favors a mix of *klezmer* and *badchon*, or folksong, material. Kapelye employs the older violin and clarinet format, although many of their tunes are taken from brass band recordings, and their instrumentals, while still exuberant, are less showily extroverted than those of their contemporary rivals. Their forte, however, is Yiddish song, learned, in some cases, from relatives and other elderly respondents. Particularly impressive are the vocals of violinist Michael Alpert, whose remarkable schmaltzy renditions perfectly capture the alternately plaintive and jocular tone of a language that has all but vanished as a living vernacular.

—Larry Birnbaum

KEITH JARRETT

CONCERTS—ECM-3-1227: *BREGENZ, PARTS I & II; UNTITLED; HEARTLAND; MÜNCHEN, PARTS I, II, III, IV; MON COEUR EST ROUGE; HEARTLAND.*
Personnel: Jarrett, piano.

★ ★ ★

To restate the obvious: there's little question that Keith Jarrett has singly devised a unique, incantatory approach to extended solo piano improvising. His *Solo Concerts: Bremen And Lausanne* of 1974 foretold of things to come. The *Köln Concert* (1976) and the monumental *Sun Bear* (1979) recordings affirmed not only the viability of his musical vision but also the marketability of his egocentric concert demeanor. Stories abound of the seance-like atmosphere which Jarrett demands at his appearances. And audiences at Jarrett's concerts are privy not only to hearing a superior musical mind straining to tune itself to the Harmony of the Spheres, or whatever, but also to seeing Jarrett's extra-musical gymnastics, a kind of *Last Tango* ritual of lithe body english, contortions, heavy breathing, and foot-stomps, all synchronized to the shifting moods of his keyboard inventions.

Most of the above, admittedly, is not strictly relevant in judging the music herein (which, incidentally, is available as a boxed, three-record set and also as a single disc comprising the Bregenz portion of these concerts). However, since Jarrett, or as he puts it in the booklet which accompanies these records, the "blazing forth of a Divine Will," has chosen to convey this meta-musical force in a Gestalt embracing both physical and musical (okay, *mystical*) modes, they do have some bearing on Jarrett's outlook, or, at least, on what happens at a typical performance by Jarrett.

The tragic moment of the visionary Romantic occurs, of course, when his pipeline to the Absolute no longer sends forth companionable forms which he can shape into substance. At the Bregenz concert, for instance, Jarrett begins with open, light contrapuntal structures, only to summarily dismiss their implications, replacing them with his stereotyped gospel/blues mix, shorn up by down-home, very-much-of-this-world foot-stomps.

But the pipeline remains clogged. After forays into bombastic bass passages, Jarrett settles into a near march, again thumping music from a reluctant piano with apparently no help from his even more reluctant muse.

München, the second major piece in this collection, opens much in the same way as the Bregenz concert: subtle chordal passages gradually flow into dense, intricate patterns. Wherever these patterns come from, Jarrett is easily one of the most contrapuntally complex improvisers playing today. And his collection of borrowed and invented dance and song forms, often subtly metrically altered to match the flow of his musical thought, is alternately whimsical and ponderous.

Throughout, Jarrett's relentless rhythmic momentum fans his oft-flickering flame of melodic invention. Add to this the pianist's obsession with ostinato bass passages and churning chordal vamps—the illusion becomes complete. Superimpose Jarrett's overlay of orgasmic cries and whimpers, often interjected incongruously into pianissimo passages, and this portrait of an artist struggling to infuse form with substance materializes in stark detail. Prometheus rebound.

For many, *Bremen And Lausanne* and *Köln* brought forth new visions of what solo piano might become. *Bregenz* and *München* reminds us that the heaven and hell of Jarrett's

private vision is, alas, as fleeting as our own worldly ones. —*Jon Balleras*

MIKE NOCK

TALISMAN—Inner City IC 3043: *SUNRISE; TALISMAN; IN YOUR OWN SWEET WAY; DIGGERS DELITE; BLACK IS THE COLOUR; FOR CINDY; CURL; WALKABOUT.*

Personnel: Nock, piano.

★ ★ ★ ½

ONDAS—ECM-1-1220: *FORGOTTEN LOVE; ONDAS; VISIONARY; LAND OF THE LONG WHITE CLOUD; DOORS.*

Personnel: Nock, piano; Eddie Gomez, bass; John Christensen, drums.

★ ★ ★ ★

Neither of these records is what you might expect. *Talisman* is not the customary tour de force for 88 keys and 10 fingers. *Ondas* is not your standard piano, bass, and drums ho-hummer, because the players are not your standard pianist, bassist, and drummer. Nock, bassist Eddie Gomez, and drummer Jon Christensen share a decidedly different view as to how this sort of trio should sound.

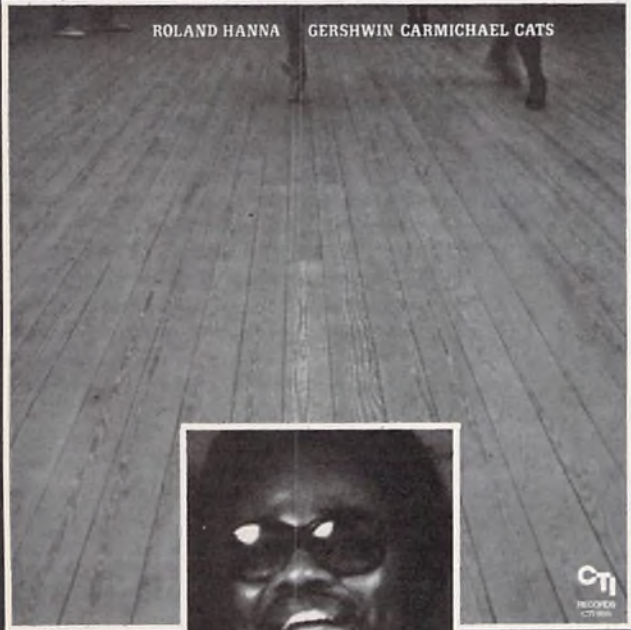

The focus for that sound is Nock's piano. The New Zealander is not one of those look-at-me virtuosos. He plays with a shy, less-is-

more approach. His *Talisman* improvisations will not leave anyone breathless. Instead of technical wizardry, he concentrates on sonic alterations, e.g. holding *this* note so its fading sound waves mingle with *that* note's initial attack. This approach helps Nock maintain the album's sunny disposition with light, aural variations on happy themes, seven of which he wrote.

Talisman's final cut, *Walkabout*, hints at what the pianist would achieve years later on *Ondas*. The Jarrettisms are replaced by a total fascination with sound. While Nock's playing follows the rules of Western harmony, it should be listened to with an Eastern appreciation for the nuances of overtones, interacting vibratos, and intervals smaller than whole and half tones. Christensen and Gomez offer splendid support in this matter. Throughout *Ondas* they function less as timekeepers and more as tonal contributors. The raga-like vamp of the title track mixes with the wind-chime tones of the bass and piano, and the cymbals' sea-breeze rustle, to produce a hypnotic effect not unlike the repetitive chanting of a mantra. It would have been nice to hear how *Ondas*' musicians would have handled *Talisman*'s tunes. But that's just wishful thinking. To a creative artist like Nock that would have been a request to turn back the clock. And that's an offer he can easily refuse. —*Cliff Radel*

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VARIOUS ARTISTS: *PISA 1980, IMPROVISER'S SYMPOSIUM (Incus 37)* ★ ★ ★ ★ ½

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TRANS-IDIO: *ALCHEMICAL ROWDIES (Trans Music 6)* ★ ★ ★

CCMC: *WITHOUT A SONG (Music Gallery Editions MGE 31)* ★ ★ ★ ½

MIT: *KNOTEN (hat Hut IR18)* ★ ★ ★

FIRST AVENUE: *FIRST AVENUE (ECM 1-1194)* ★ ★ ★ ½

"THERE ARE TWO MUSICS (AT LEAST SO I have always thought): the music one listens to, the music one plays," observed French structuralist Roland Barthes in his essay *Musica Practica* (translated by Stephen Heath and published in *Image/Music/Text*, Hill and Wang, 1977). "These two musics are totally different arts, each with its own history, its own sociology, its own aesthetics, its own erotic; the same composer can be minor if you listen to him, tremendous if you play him (even badly). . . .

"The music one plays comes from an activity that is very little auditory, being above all manual (and thus in a way much more sensual)," wrote Barthes, who traced the history of music through three stages. "There was first the actor of music, then the interpreter, then finally the technician, who relieves the listener of all activity . . . and

abolishes in the sphere of music the very notion of *doing*." Barthes was speaking of European concert music, of course, but his points apply to improvised musics as well, I think. For the improviser starting from scratch, improvisation is an art but first of all an act, a fully human activity needing as its justification no chord sequences, no composer's graph, no tribal or ceremonial sanctions—nothing beyond the desire and ability to play an instrument. These musicians (some of them virtuosi from classical music or jazz, some of them rank amateurs and proud of it) have relinquished their intermediary roles as shamans or technicians to again become *actors of music*, playing what Barthes would call *practical music*—a music in which theory and technique are subservient to the actual *practice* of music.

But is their music listenable? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Both *Pisa 1980* and *The Science Set* serve as excellent primers on the enigmatic art of free improvisation; both gather together key figures, European and American; both contain excellent performances. Present in various configurations ranging from duos to quintets at *Pisa 1980* were trombonists George Lewis, Paul Ruth-erford, and Giancarlo Schiaffini; saxophonist Evan Parker; guitarist Derek Bailey; bassists Maarten Altena and Barry Guy; percussionists Paul Lovens and Paul Lytton; and violinist Phil Wachsmann (with Lytton and Wachsmann also programming live electronics). While the larger group performances have their points of interest (an especially successful integration of natural and processed sounds on *San Zeno Quintet*, shifting tonal loyalties among the two bassists and the three trombonists on *Pisa Quartet*), the most stimulating, most deeply satisfying performances here are the duets—two between Parker and Lewis, one between Bailey and Altena—which exhibit a sense of form rare in any music, but astonishing in a music whose moods and directives are so momentary, so fugitive. Total improvisation

may owe its initial inspiration to Ornette Coleman's desire to "play with memory," but it bears little idiomatic resemblance to Coleman or any other jazz today. However, Parker has accomplished something that has profound implications for jazz, I believe. He is putting needed space around the techniques and sounds invented by Coltrane and the late '60s energy players—the multiphonics, split tones, false fingerings, circular breathing, the almost intestinal thrust—draining them of extra-musical association, of the possibility for hysteria. The effect is often stunning, always shocking. Bailey's hacking yet surprisingly gentle strumming techniques have influenced jazz already (consider A. Spencer Barefield's work on Roscoe Mitchell's *Snurdy McGurdy*) and, of course, he has spawned a brood of guitarists in his exact image, including most of the guitarists on the other records considered here.

Parker and Bailey are also present on *The Science Set*, along with Bay Area residents Larry Ochs, Jon Raskin, and Andrew Voight (all from the Rova Saxophone Quartet); Greg Goodman (piano); Henry Kaiser (electric guitar); and New Yorker Toshinori Kondo (trumpet). Again, the gathering is broken up into smaller combinations (except for one lurching seven-minute ensemble) and, again, the most provocative moments arise cut of duets involving Bailey (with Raskin) and Parker (with Kondo). There's also an intense, breathtakingly intricate Parker soprano solo. The remainder achieves a very high level, with two exceptions: Kaiser's playing, which I find unremittingly, unredeemably abrasive and ugly; and the aforementioned collective, which is as noisy and empty as a JATP free-for-all or the loft session of your darkest fears, and not necessarily that much more daring.

The same criticism, magnified, also applies to *The Social Set*, a 43-minute performance by the same personnel (with Bailey out and Bruce Ackley—Rova's fourth member—in), except to note that there are explosions whenever Parker or Goodman (a dark, rumbling pianist) pushes to the surface, or whenever the men from Rova pull together to assert drama and structure.

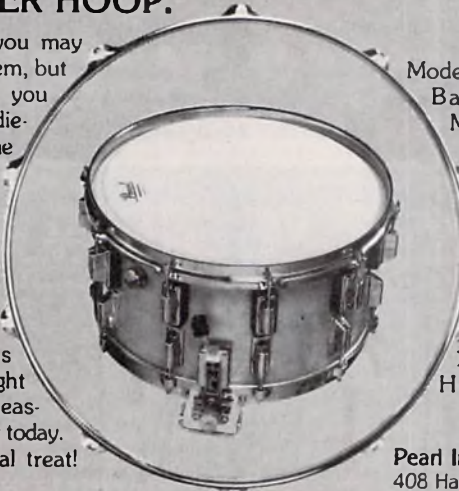
That free solos, duos, even trios jell more frequently than collectives probably indicates that free improvisers have agreed on a standard vocabulary but have not yet forged a common language. There's impressive syntactical order on *In Flagranti*, a 15-minute-plus quintet improvisation on *Vario II*, which suggests that even groups of five can converse meaningfully in this idiom provided that each speaker knows that silence sometimes speaks louder than words. The members of *Vario* (trombonist Gunter Christmann and whomever he's playing with at the time—in this case, Lovens, Altena, guitarist John Russell, and vocalist Maggie Nichols) all perform admirably in the smaller combinations they break up into also. Christmann is an engagingly blustery trombonist, manipulating his horn with an extroverted facility that recalls Roswell Rudd at times. Lovens' spacious and stinging percussion and Altena's almost violent double stops both make an even greater impression here than on the *Pisa LP*, and Nichols' range and flexibility permit her to take as many liberties as any of

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the instrumentalists, though she is careful never to let her jittery, fragmented syllables and throat sounds dominate.

Is it dashed jingoism that makes me regret that Europeans like Parker, Bailey, and the members of Vario seem to have a firmer grasp on the possibilities of free improvisation than North Americans do? Too many of the Americans included in this admittedly random sampling mistake self-expression for creativity. There's a boisterous, sometimes pointedly satiric bend of humor on some of the American records I find less attractive than the dry, indirect wit of Bailey or Nichols. These tendencies at their most extreme result in the tortured posturings of Minnesota's **Milo Fine Free Jazz Ensemble** and the whiz-kid experimentation of New Yorkers **Michael Lytle, George Cartwright, and David Moss**. To be fair about it, Fine, who also plays drums and clarinet, shows signs of finding an original piano style on his latest release (by comparison, all the other pianists here—even good ones like Goodman—sound like blurred xeroxes of Cecil Taylor). And in moderation I enjoy the demented busker poses of Steve Gnitka, Fine's guitarist. The third member of the Ensemble is Elliott Fine, Milo's father and a Rich/Bellson-styled drummer who sounds like he's having a good time.

There's something annoyingly glib and Zappaishly solipsistic about the music of Lytle (clarinets, electric tape, voice), Cartwright (saxophones, flutes, guitar, voice), and Moss (percussion, little instruments, voice), although—again, to be fair—their bold ambition and obvious technical facility are rewards enough on some of their album's shorter, more rebus-like tracks. Moss in particular is an astonishingly talented musician, seemingly able to stroke or bludgeon sound, rhythm, and motion out of any surface his hands land on, and some of Lytle's tape creations are imaginative and gripping.

But I find the hoedown humor and homemade skills of LaDonna Smith and Davey Williams more palatable on the whole. Alchemical Alabamans Smith—a buzzing, swarming violinist and loony, almost inaudible wordless singer—and Williams—an over-under-sideways-down guitarist—perform as **Trans Museq**; here they confront the rowdier Virginia group **Idio Savant** (Paul Watson, trumpet, alto horn; Danny Finney, saxophones; J. Pippin Barnett, percussion) to form **Trans-Idio**. The music born of this encounter is as intimate and as whimsical as any you'll find in the genre. But it's also a music one eventually loses patience with, as it moves listlessly from place to place, never quite going anywhere.

The music of the **Canadian Creative Music Company** (filmmaker Michael Snow, trumpet, keyboards; Casey Sokol, piano, synthesizer; Nobuo Kubota, alto saxophone, drums; and Al Mattes, synthesizer and electric and acoustic bass, with everyone grabbing little instruments—harmonicas, glockenspiels, whistles, maracas, cowbells, etc.—and found objects—beer bottles, CB receivers, shell casings, rubber ducks, and the like—when not busy playing something else) speaks the code of bohemians everywhere: the hope that all hell will break loose, and the trust that order will prevail in the end. Not a bad code to live by either, and I enjoy

both the happy accidents and the moments that almost sound pre-ordained (the crystallization of a few random chords into the standard *Without A Song*, for instance, and the brilliant contrast of dreamy synthesizer and nettled alto on *Low Blow*). But there are also too many dry stretches in which nothing much happens before order asserts itself, and too many noises made just for the hell of it.

The CCMC bears strong resemblance to some of the early AACM groups, and the resemblance of the Swiss Group **Mit** (Felix Bopp, piano; Alex Buess, alto saxophone, bass clarinet; Alfred Zimmerlin, cello; and Knut Remond, percussion, xylophone) to a Cecil Taylor group is even more pronounced. These energetic young musicians sound much less derivative, however, and much more focused whenever the wave rhythms subside, the piano and alto resolve their questioning discourse, the drummer abandons his trap set for the hollow sounding xylophone, and their music becomes fitfully, compellingly polyrhythmic for a few fleeting moments. It's worth the wait, and the intensity keeps the wait from becoming boring.

Mit might appeal to those jazz listeners who like Taylor and Coleman but don't like Parker and Bailey. And ECM's visibility and high-gloss engineering along with the domesticated nature of **First Avenue's** improvisations might win that Seattle trio (James Knapp, trumpet, flugelhorn, waterphone; Denny Goodhew, alto saxophone, flute, bass clarinet; Eric Jensen, cello) an audience that rarely listens to improvised music of any kind. Their music is precise and graceful, totally improvised but obviously influenced by composers like Glass and Reich (the trills and triplets, the cyclical feel) and even Aaron Copland of all people, unless my ears deceive me (some of the high, wide, and handsome harmonies on side two). I only wish they didn't dawdle so. Far from grabbing you by the short hairs the way most of these records do, this one seems designed to leave you to your own thoughts.

Conclusions? Even at its best, "instant composition" is difficult to listen to, difficult to write about, especially difficult to judge. There are no paradigms to look to in hashing out a rating—the landmark recordings in this genre (Spontaneous Music Ensemble, Music Improvisation Company, Company, Braxton/Bailey) are by design so hit-and-miss that they set no standards, and my own favorites (Parker's *Live At The Finger Palace* [Metalanguage 110], Bailey's *Domestic & Public Pieces* [Quark 9999], Rutherford's *The Gentle Harm Of The Bourgeoisie* [Emanem 3305]) are all solos, not group records, anyway. And not even they excite me as much as a concert I attended at the London Institute of Contemporary Art in 1979, which featured Parker, Bailey, Barry Guy, and Tony Coe. Perhaps all I am saying is you had to be there. A music of the exact moment is antithetical to the recording process in a way. Ownership of a record we can play over and over at our own convenience encourages complacent consumerism in a way paid attendance at a concert does not. The anticipation and relief of hearing sound burst into being and decay is lost on record—a point that might be made about any music, but especially crucial to music completely improvised. Then there is the fact that compression into a microgroove deprives this music of the dynamic contrasts—the almost inaudible nattering and the brutal outbursts—that are perhaps its most physically startling aural characteristics.

Free improvisation is a performance art for these and many other reasons, but since we can't always be there, we must rely on records, just as the musicians rely on records for a good part of their income. Better these records than no records at all. This is a phenomenon too important to miss.

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Aladár Pege

The bassist from Hungary carries on in the virtuoso tradition of Charles Mingus.

BY LEE JESKE

Aladár Pege (pronounced Pay-gay) was not the only European to pay his first visit to the United States last summer, but he may have left with the best souvenir of all. Not a Florida coconut carved into a face, or an I Love New York t-shirt, but one of Charles Mingus' basses.

At the 1980 Jazz Yatra, in Bombay, the Hungarian Pege stunned the audience with a dazzling display of bass virtuosity. In that audience was Susan Mingus, widow of Charles and in India that year with Mingus Dynasty. Mrs. Mingus was so moved by the performance that within minutes of Pege's last note, he was confronted with a weeping American woman trying to tell him in English (which he doesn't speak a word of) that she was going to give him one of Charles Mingus' instruments. Two-and-a-half years later, Aladár Pege arrived at the Mingus apartment in midtown Manhattan and collected his bass.

At the age of 43, Pege is one of Europe's best-kept jazz secrets. In the past three years, however, this has begun to change. There have been two wonderful duet albums with pianist Walter Norris (recorded for Enja), as well as an appearance with the Mingus Dynasty at the 1980 Montreux Jazz Festival (released on Atlantic 16031), and this past summer's appearance with Herbie Hancock and Tony Williams at the Kool/New York Festival.

On the afternoon of his Kool/NY performance at Carnegie Hall, Pege is seated at a friend's apartment. The two men are huddled over a telephone—George, the friend, is doing the translating for Pege, who speaks only Hungarian and German, and they are trying to find an inexpensive yet secure way to have the Mingus bass sent back to Budapest. After a lot of head-shaking and general disgust at the options, Aladár Pege tells me about his life.

"My grandfather and father were both bass players," he says through the interpreter. "My father is 73 years old now, and he's retired. He had a colorful career that spanned jazz playing to opera—from A to Z. In his time a bass player was required to play everything. A restaurant orchestra in Budapest at that time was required to play one-and-a-half to two hours per night of dinner music, which



MITCHELL SEIDEL

consisted of light opera, Strauss waltzes, and medleys of popular tunes. After that, maybe the show would go on. The bass player would know how to play trombone, and all the saxophonists played violins and cellos—if you see an older European saxophone player it's almost 100 percent sure he knows how to play violin.

"I was born on October 8, 1939, an only child. When I was 15, I started playing the bass; I went to a music school which gave a music school education with the emphasis on studying to be a classical bass violinist. I started listening to jazz in 1955, and when I first seriously considered studying the instrument, I started to pay attention to jazz. Everybody used to listen to Willis Conover's *Voice Of America* broadcasts. He played a lot of West Coast jazz, and I heard Bud Shank, Red Mitchell, Zoot Sims, Leroy Vinnegar, Chet Baker, Shorty Rogers, and all of that was influential to me."

At the same time, Pege was continuing his classical music education and, he says, "Within three years I had conquered the most difficult bass concertos." He spent the '50s studying at the Bela Bartok Academy by day and playing in dance orchestras by night.

"And there were jam sessions," he recalls. "The United States vice-consulate, or whatever his title was, was a big jazz buff. He would bring in albums and we would get together and listen to them. It was very hard getting jazz albums; if anybody got his hands on an American album, there would be a call and everybody would go up to his apartment and listen to it. Like the gospel. As far as I know, there were no individual American bands coming to Hungary at this time. The earliest jazz band I remember was a German radio dance jazz band."

Pege kept up with the American scene through Willis Conover, and he cites Oscar Pettiford as the first bass player who made a very strong impression on him, with Ray

Brown and Scott LaFaro coming afterwards. In 1963 he formed the first Aladár Pege Quartet.

"At that time it was not possible to just have a jazz band—you had to be flexible and play night clubs and restaurants and open-air concerts. It had jazz overtones—it was jazz-flavored dance music—but there wasn't such a thing as playing only jazz. We played Gershwin, Cole Porter, and some of the guys would take two or three improvised choruses. But if we overdid this, the boss of the establishment—and it was not really his place, because there were no private sectors at this time—would come and say, 'Please stop this.'"

In 1963 Pege's quartet played at the Blad (Yugoslavia) Jazz Festival—mixing originals and standards. It was Pege's first jazz festival, but it wasn't until the 1964 Blad fest that he was to see his first American band in the flesh: the Modern Jazz Quartet.

Back in Hungary, Pege's quartet worked strictly in dance clubs since, he says, to this day there are no places in Hungary where you can make a living playing jazz. At the same time he was studying at the prestigious Franz Liszt Academy—playing the small classical bass repertoire, which he supplemented with transcriptions of violin and cello pieces. One of the things which kept him out of a symphony orchestra, he says, is that in Hungary "the pay is considerably less than if you play in dance bands. But I had some concerts where the first part was dedicated to classical music, me and a piano accompaniment, and the second part was solely for jazz. I was doing much better with my dance band than I would have with a symphony, because I was called in to do film scores, recordings, television."

At the same time, Pege was teaching bass, and in 1969 when he graduated from the Liszt Academy, he immediately was asked to stay on as an assistant professor. And somehow he still found time to take his group to jazz festivals, such as Berlin and Montreux, where his quartet won a critics' prize in 1970. At one festival he was heard by Willis Conover, the man who introduced him, indirectly, to jazz in the first place. Pege's awesome technique, particularly with the bow, caused Conover to write, "Apart from Mingus, David Izenzon, and Richard Davis, I've heard no bassist anywhere who surpasses Pege's virtuosity. I'm tempted to regard him simply as a great Gypsy violinist playing jazz on a bass."

Yet despite Pege's cornucopia of activity in Budapest, he still wasn't satisfied—the assistant professorship paid very little, and the jazz opportunities in Hungary were sparse at best. In 1975 he moved to West Berlin. "West Berlin was very good for me. I played Fender bass in an orchestra that accompanied singers doing show tunes. That was what I did officially, but I was starting to meet and play with musicians like Leo Wright, Carmell

Jones, Walter Norris, Rolf Ericson. I played with them on and off in jazz clubs, playing bop. I also played with a lot of East German musicians, playing free jazz. And I advanced my classical music further by studying with the section leader of the Berlin Philharmonic. I got to hear a lot of Americans—like Miles Davis—in Berlin, too. Berlin was one of the most important cities in my life, as far as furthering my own musical career.

"But my ambition was always to live in Hungary, and not in West Berlin or New York or any other place. That's why I didn't sign contracts to play with certain orchestras in Berlin. I stayed there three years, and three years was enough. Then I went to Vienna for eight months, but I was longing for my country. Then the bass professor at the Franz Liszt Academy retired, and my name came up. They called me and told me there was an opening if I wanted to take it—I took it. A few days later the Vienna radio came and offered me a three-year contract. I went back home."

Back in Budapest in 1978, Pege reformed his quartet and, he says proudly, since that time "I've only played my own compositions. We work mostly in clubs, at universities, and on radio. And I play classical music at the concert hall, in the music academy, and other places. My last concert consisted of Vivaldi, Bottesini, Saint-Saëns, and Bartok."

Jazzwise, 1980 was Pege's greatest year. His first album with Walter Norris (*Synchronicity*, Inner City 3028) was released and garnered a four-and-a-half star review in these pages; his triumph in India led to rave reviews in *db*, the *International Herald Tribune*, and *Melody Maker*; he performed and recorded with Mingus Dynasty; and he waxed his second LP with Norris (*Winter Rose*, Inner City 3038).

As we speak, Pege is uneasy. He is worried about getting the precious Mingus bass back to Hungary, he is worried about fitting in with Hancock and Williams at Carnegie Hall that night, and he is worried about finding a bass he can use for the performance (the Mingus bass being in disrepair).

His worries are, it turns out, for naught. The bass arrived in Budapest unscathed, and it turned out to be a fine, old French instrument; the Carnegie performance went well—Hancock even applauded from his piano bench after one of Pege's solos; and Milt Hinton lent Pege his bass, reclaiming it with the remark, "If I knew you were going to play so much music, I wouldn't have lent it to you."

Aside from Pege's technical virtuosity, one thing that sets him apart from his American peers is the thick, Eastern European accent his playing carries. He is proud of that and emphasizes it by frequently playing arrangements of old Hungarian folk songs. "I like Hungarian folk music very much—it's in my blood. It's in my background and in my roots. It's inside, and if somebody says, 'You play with a distinct Hungarian flavor,' it's good. It's nothing to be ashamed of." **db**

Azymuth

The Brazilian trio offers a fusion of samba and improvisation, spiced with a blend of traditional and modern concepts.

BY FRANKIE NEMKO-GRAHAM

The completion of their fourth Milestone album provided the opportunity for Azymuth to at last make a personal appearance in North America. Based in Rio de Janeiro, the group—keyboardist Jose Bertrami, bassist Alex Malheiros, and drummer Ivan Conti (Mamao)—recently made their U.S. debut at the Great American Music Hall in San Francisco.

The main purpose of this visit, however, was to put the finishing touches to *Cascades* (Milestone M-9109) and to meet with some of the curious press. I had heard their three previous albums—*Telecommunication* (M-9101), *Outubro* (M-9097), and *Light As A Feather* (M-9089)—and was anxious to discuss a disparity I thought existed. Through an interpreter I pointed out to Alex and Jose that I had expected their music to be percussion-filled, hot and passionate. Instead, what I heard was a rather low-key fusion of South and North American sounds, of traditional and modern concepts. Bertrami explained: "The energy grows; we don't let the beast out right away. My background is in the Brazilian samba school, and I translate the drums through my fingers into the keyboards. This produces a Brazilian samba rhythm rather than latin."

Azymuth's story is not particularly unusual in terms of its formation and subsequent

activity. Bertrami and Conti met while working in the same club, with different groups. Jose said that he would listen to Mamao playing with the rock & roll group that alternated with his bossa nova band and think: "That guy should be doing this kind of music." Mamao was interested in Bertrami's suggestion to work together; then they began looking for a suitable bass player.

In a bowling alley one night, Bertrami and Conti heard Alex Malheiros with a folk-style band, and they knew right away that he was the right third member. And so Azymuth was born. Both Bertrami and Malheiros had been writing, and when they put these compositions together, they formed the basis of what would become an extremely popular sound with Brazilian audiences.

Although the music of Azymuth could not be classified as jazz in the strictest sense of the word, one of Bertrami's main influences (he writes 70 percent of the band's material) was Bill Evans, whom he started listening to when he was only 15 years old. At the same time, and without knowing each other, Malheiros was digging the bassist Scott LaFaro—the Evans/LaFaro collaborations are by now famous. There have been many other elements absorbed since, but the improvisational nature of Azymuth's music is always apparent.

One aspect of the Azymuth trademark was explained by Bertrami, who said that they compose only when the mood is right. "We never write because we have to, because we're pressured." This would explain a sense of relaxation one feels listening to them; there is no urgency, no intensity, and yet all the ingredients of well-constructed music, of intelligent and interesting composition emerge.

Azymuth owes much of its individuality to the multi-keyboard work of Bertrami. He insists that he is "a little behind schedule" as far as electronics are concerned. He is still

From left: Alex Malheiros, Ivan Conti, Jose Bertrami



PHIL BRAY

using a vintage Oberheim synthesizer which he says is fast becoming a rarity, but finds that it works just fine for his needs. In addition, he has a Rhodes electric piano, Hammond organ, Mini-Moog, a Roland Bass echo, and a harmonizer that doubles the sound for special effects. Jose said: "I'm not an expert on electronics. I just go searching for the sound I want; I try an instrument and if the sound suits me, I use it. The problem in Brazil is that there is no engineer or technician available. So I have to know at least some technicalities—I've just learned through experience. I've been playing electronic keyboards for the past six years, and before that I had some contact with early electric instruments, even though at that time I was playing only acoustic piano."

Malheiros has the distinction of being the first bassist in Brazil to use an electric instrument. He told a story of how his uncle and his father, who both played stringed instruments, saw a photo of a Gibson bass back in 1956. From that picture, they built an early model electric bass. Alex's own present instrument, which he built himself, is made of a fusion of Italian, Japanese, and American parts and a rare Brazilian wood.

During the band's early years they released several albums on Brazilian labels before the Milestone association, and Azymuth continues to stay busy in their homeland. As a group they generally give at least three concerts a month; individually, the musicians are in demand for studio work, often appearing on Brazilian movie soundtracks. Their records sell well in Europe, and in 1977 the group was presented at the Montreux Jazz Festival. The following year Flora Purim invited them to back her on an American tour. At presstime, negotiations are under way for an extensive U.S. junket, and plans are set for more European dates.

While bossa nova rhythms have been extremely popular in the United States for over 20 years, the current sounds emanating from Brazil generally have a more limited appeal. Bertrami told me that although there are other groups in Brazil playing similar music to Azymuth's, most of them are limited by the use of vocals. He feels that by not including Portuguese lyrics, Azymuth represents a viable international product. On *Telecommunication*, however, vocal effects are heard through the use of a vocoder.

Listening again to the records, I began to hear and feel a subtle yet insidious quality enlivening the grooves. This is not music to tax the brain or challenge the intellect. But it is also not easily dismissed. Azymuth represents a trend, that has been gathering force worldwide for the past several years, toward a gentler, less demanding form of entertainment. As more people are turning to such relaxants as meditation, groups like Azymuth offer a colorful alternative, and a welcome surcease from the high-decibel sounds that come at us from the airwaves. **db**

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7 TONY WILLIAMS. SOME HIP DRUM SHIT/THE URCHINS OF SHERMESE (from *EGO*, Polydor). Williams, drums, composer, arrangements; Don Alias, Warren Smith, percussion.

That's somebody very heavily into the Tony Williams school. It might be Tony, or Billy Hart, or Jack DeJohnette, it's hard to tell. That dry sound in the bass drum, Jack DeJohnette plays that very well, and there's a lot of it in there, so I'd go with Jack DeJohnette. The drummer's part is good; I didn't listen to it as a composition. It wasn't structured like a composition, but more in a way to realize certain effects. It had Jack DeJohnette's cymbal sound, too, I think.

8 BILLY HART. CORNER CULTURE (from *ENCHANCE*, A&M Horizon). Hart, drums; Dewey Redman, composer, tenor saxophone; Oliver Lake, alto saxophone; Hannibal Marvin Peterson, trumpet; Don Pullen, piano; Dave Holland, bass.

That's one of the two most interesting things I've heard, with the Tatum piece. I could listen to this over and over and over again and discover new things in it; that, to me, is one of the joys of music.

In certain ways, structurally, it's like Ornette Coleman. It would be interesting to know where musicians would go if they didn't know where to go. If Ornette and Cecil Taylor hadn't existed, would they naturally go to this place? I wish these musicians would go to that place themselves, go to that same place but use their own route to get there. Here's somebody that knows that spot exists like that; but where would they go if there was a black hole?

9 ORNETTE COLEMAN. HAPPY HOUSE (from *BROKEN SHADOWS*, Columbia). Coleman, composer, alto saxophone; Dewey Redman, tenor saxophone; Don Cherry, Bobby Bradford, trumpet; Charlie Haden, bass; Ed Blackwell, Billy Higgins, drums.

The head was very beautiful. Ornette would have to send to New Orleans or Texas, somewhere in the country, to get some drummer to play his music, because the trouble with most drummers is they're all playing too slick. They're all playing the cliches and slick stuff, instead of just playing the music. Blackwell's not playing nothing slick, he's playing nothing but music and rhythms—you've got to go to the country to get that, because in the city everybody's playing the latest beat. That's very good, I like that. I haven't heard it before. I know there are two drummers there, but Blackwell is the one that's playing. Billy Higgins is not a technical drummer.

Playing with Ornette, you just have to listen. It's not anything different or strange; it's like being on the inside of a room, in a building, and listening to what's outside, knowing which of those buildings outside you're going to listen to from in here. That's all Ornette is doing, listening. Once you listen you can hear. The hardest part is hearing, after you learn to listen. It really is.

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And as if to defy all those who may have thought that the iconoclastic Frith was going soft and sweet on them, he formed the powerful and abrasive trio *Massacre* in 1980. This band—with Frith on guitars, keyboards, and violins—features the rather muscular drumming of Fred Maher and the booming, funky bass bottom of Bill Laswell, co-founder of *Material*. This group, Frith says, “was formed to play the kind of loud and energetic racket that you hear in clubs. The group is a direct response to New York. It’s a very aggressive group, kind of my reaction to the whole New York rock club scene. But it doesn’t exist anymore. We put out an album called *Killing Time*. It was a limited statement.”

After *Henry Cow* broke up, Frith moved to New York City in 1979 and has been continuously involved in a number of musical projects ever since. “For the last four years most of what I’ve been doing has been based on improvisation on-stage. After 10 years of playing in a group whose music was often highly structured, I wasn’t about to get right back into that again, so I’ve been mostly improvising. But now with the new band, *Skeleton Crew*, I’m moving back again to more structured things for the first time in four years. *Skeleton Crew* is an idea of having three one-man bands in one unit. We don’t have a drummer. I’ll be playing the guitar and the bass drum and hi-hat at the same time; Dave Newhouse from the *Muffins* will be playing saxophone and snare drum at the same time; and Tom Cora from the group *Curlew* will be playing cello and some kind of drum at the same time. It’s an idea of trying to find new sources of rhythm apart from your standard trap set. And we’ve managed to get a certain kind of homogeneity with this setup which is very interesting and also provides a kind of rhythmic tension that you wouldn’t get with just one drummer doing it all. It’s all just on the edge of breaking down all the time, which is a quality that I’ve always liked. I don’t like things to be too easy.”

Besides his varied interests in musical forms, Frith also has an ongoing passion for tape manipulation (which he explored in full force

on his second *Ralph* album, *Speechless*, released last year) and for sound malfunctions. “It seems to me that so much more can be done with tape than what’s being done in the field of rock music,” he says. “Most people go into the studio with the idea of somehow creating an enhanced performance. You go in and perform the music that you’ve already made, and then you somehow add to that, but it’s still basically the same unit. I’m interested in using the studio for things that you couldn’t possibly do in a performance, to use the medium of tape in a way which is intrinsic to it. Editing is the one obvious thing that you can do with tape. We’re using some tapes on-stage with *Skeleton Crew*, as we had done with *Art Bears* in the past. Most of these tapes are involving speech, voices, and some actual content. I’ve been cutting up tv ads recently and sort of reorganizing them so they come out sounding not quite as they were intended.” He adds, with a note of irreverent glee, “I like the kind of electronics where you can cause something to malfunction in a way that makes it sound more interesting than how it was supposed to sound. So a lot of the sounds that I get in the studio have been specifically the result of overloading or causing to malfunction various pieces of technology, like harmonizers or digital delays. Interesting things start to happen when things begin to break down.”

So while the eclectic and ever-adventurous Mr. Frith is away in Europe on tour with *Skeleton Crew*, practicing how to play guitar and drums at the same time before coming back to unveil that act in the States, we have a stack of extremely diverse documents of his own musical ideas to ponder. In assessing the great depth of each recorded statement, it’s hard to believe that such a variety of expression could come from just one man, just one mind. But as Frith says, “Well, there’s no rule that you have to do only one kind of music. Sometimes it seems to me that musicians restrict themselves needlessly, either for commercial reasons, because they do something successful and feel compelled to reproduce it forever, or because they believe that in order to really do something right, you have to specialize totally in it and not deviate from it. But I’m interested in tackling all kinds of things. I always was.” db

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